



Ouroboros Record

# ウロボロス レコード

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# **Ouroboros Record**

## **~Circus of Oubeniel~**

**- Volume 1 -**  
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# Chapter 5

## Oubeniel Brothers

Half a year ago, father passed away.

His condition took a turn for the worse last spring, so I extended my spring break to take care of him, but it did not turn out well.

That was because father's dislike towards alchemy became revulsion towards me and thus, he completely rejected any treatments from me.

I am already 18 years old. I was a half-assed alchemist a decade ago, but now, I am recognised as a successor from a highly acclaimed professor. An illness of that level would not pose a problem to anyone who went through the trainings from the academy, and yet, father was resolute in rejecting treatment. At that moment, I was made to quit school and had to make a round trip home. Just when father thought I had gone overseas, I reappeared and, due to that, his condition suddenly worsened.

Well, my pace of expending slaves in my radical human experimentation was too fast, horrifying father so much that he brought me to church. The trust he has in me has reached rock bottom. The medicine that I had provided him with probably seemed like poison obtained by trading with the devil.

Honestly speaking, I am hardly sad at all. To me, my parents are the parents of my previous life and even though I feel indebted for him raising me, he treated my repayment with disdain and died in the end. On the contrary, I am the one being painted in bad light.

Even if I say so myself, I thought it was cold-hearted. And that was how I really felt.

The only problem that cropped up was that brother was supposed to easily inherit the family headship when father passed away, but the lawyers administering the country's court were, for some reason, delaying it. I made Yuni investigate and it appears the reason lies in me. I heard wild rumours in the streets that someone like Talese Shernan Obeniel would have no qualms deposing his brother from being the next Earl.... They

are greatly mistaken.

Profiting from the sale of potions and selling equipment I made myself in the academy would project the image of avarice to others, won't it? All I wanted was just a place to research, funds, raw ingredients and cooperative people. The lecturer who is my mentor often says, it is extremely difficult to gain the understanding of people...

In any case, this was handled amicably again. The investigating officer did realise himself that he had partially misunderstood and while resolving the remaining doubts he had of me, I took the chance to request a few things of him, so he reported nothing problematic to the High Court. Incidentally, the investigation log that I read wrote the circumstances of a former retainer from my family. Hence, partly because I am still thankful of him, I treated him, who loves drinking, to homemade quality liquor. Right now, he must be having the sensation of climbing up into the skies. I mean, that first-generation knight did take care of me in many ways. This is just my way of thanking him and silencing him.

Now that all is back to normal, brother finally became the head and with my share of inheritance, I can research to my heart's content. A win-win situation. After all, the academy's alchemy faculty has a smaller budget. Above that, it was also a governmental institution, so there was surveillance too. It wasn't just once or twice that complaints regarding the research were directed towards me. It was an attractive prospect to have the help of mages who were familiar with fields outside my expertise, but I'm sure I'll be able to work out something outside school as long as I have money. Now that I have amassed a large fortune, I am aiming to conduct a research more complex than ever before, even though I am no longer part of the academy. I have written copies of important documents from there and have self-taught a significant amount of know-how too. I no longer have any regrets about leaving. And thus, I have **no worries** for the future.

"No worries," should have been the case...

"How are you doing, brother?"

I asked, facing the new owner of the office in the mansion. Brother called me into the room while handling paperwork.

As though the chair that was occupied by father before he was bedridden was completely his, brother stopped signing off paperwork and looked up.

“Did you not hear? Then I shall say it once more. Under one of our land, I plan to dismantle and reorganise a manor that has been acting as the prefectural governor. At the same time, you’ll be entrusted with the rank of a viscount. Since you have been given this role, you have to go there.”

This brief explanation at point blank.

I am given peerage and territory. At first glance, it probably sounds alluring. Since I can set foot on the path to success as an aristocrat. Normally, this would be something to cry about with tears of joy. However, being the owner of territory would mean I have to relocate to the actual region. It means that I have to abandon this relatively well-built city, abandon the safety of the capital behind the imperial guards and go to the countryside where there are many inconveniences and less public security.

Put simply, brother is saying that a good-for-nothing second son should be contented with fleeing the city.

This is no joke. A large-scale city like the capital, Brosenul, has the most optimum slave market to restock the crucial guinea pigs for my research. Furthermore, many goods circulate to the capital through the links to the highway. To be forced to leave this kind of place, I would have no choice but to reduce the scope of the experiments.

I could substitute the slaves with the local residents, but that would be a terrible move. By doing that frequently, it would create negative effects on the management of the land as the manpower of farmers and workers would dip and motivation of labourers would decrease too. To make matters worse, if I excessively convert commoners to slaves, I might be charged with excess misconduct and appear on the radar of the High Court of Justice that I tried so hard to avoid. At that point of time, it won’t even be about continuing the research; it’ll be my ruin.

Also, I hold control over the company that sell potions — my source of income. It would incur a heavy blow on me economically.

...No way, no way! I cannot accept this at all!

“Please wait! I mean... it has not been long since brother took over the role of family head? Hence, dividing the land might cause confusion to governmental affairs? Yeah? Why don’t we not do this?”

I summarised my points frantically, but brother simply snorted. Damn it, acting like this because he got his most desired position as the head of the family. Had I known it would turn out this way, I would have chosen the option of grabbing the headship even if I had to kill him. Though there are many risks associated with doing so.

“What are you saying. The royal court has already begun to move. If not so, I couldn’t have given you any peerage. If you object here, it would be cause of confusion instead. Surely you are capable of understanding this much?”

...You were the one who made the royal court move in the first place.

Not everything is difficult. For this country — and other countries too — the title of viscount could be called vice-Earl, and is mainly a subordinate of the Earl. Even if it is a court rank that can be granted important roles, it is basically following orders of an Earl and its family members, not to mention that I am being made to follow those orders. In short, the right to appoint roles lies with the country, but with brother’s position, exercising his powers and influencing would be an easy task.

“T-That is true, though...”

“Also, we can’t have the son of the glorious Obeniel family rotting away aimlessly at home all the time, can we? Shouldn’t you consider this an opportunity? Since it hasn’t been that long since your path to scholarship was severed. This is your chance for you to endeavour in a path fitting of an aristocrat.”

Such a solid argument. He then turned his around. A well executed way of cutting off my escape route. If I were to reject him now, I would be considered as neglecting my responsibility as an aristocrat, and society’s trust in me — even though it may not be high — would become zero. That is as good as declining a life where I can support myself in a feudalistic society in which social status and power determines all. Speaking in terms of my previous world, it is similar to a company which can no longer take loans. Nobody would want to deal with such a person. It would be problematic in discussing business with merchants and cut off the funds required for purchasing guinea pigs.

Nevertheless, is this how you treat a younger brother who has quietly held back over the inheriting of the family headship? I don’t expect him to be choked full of tears of

gratitude, but he should at least have the generosity to support the dream of his adorable brother.

No way I could say that though.

“Brother... do you wish to chase me out of the house that much?”

It was a question which I didn’t expect to be answered. I meant it to be the frivolous whining of a sore loser.

However, brother glared at me with flashing eyes.

“——Of course.”

He declared.

“How bad do you think the rumours about our family have gotten because of your blood-stinking experiments? It’s true that all of those you killed were slaves at the most. I’m not saying that it is run counter to the laws. However, surely there is a limit to everything!?”

He slammed the desk, stood up, abruptly walked towards the window area and opened the windows forcefully.

“Look, we can see the remnants of the cremation at the courtyard from here! Did you know that because of you doing all those things year in year out, except when you went abroad for studies, we weren’t able to hold any night parties at home!? Not only that, it has been more than once or twice that other households are creeped out whenever they see from afar a fire being lit in our courtyard. Do you understand how miserable we were then!?”

Brother appeared to be unsettled, as he gestured with trembling hands, and scratched his head at times. Moreover, he did it in rapid succession. He didn’t even give me the chance to squeeze in a few words.

What can I do? It seems that I have flipped a bad switch.

“In addition, do you know how old I am? Twenty-five. Not a strange age to be having children, right? Despite that, I am still single. That’s all thanks to you! All the families

are afraid of you and don't want to send their daughters here! Let's not even mention my very first fiancée, whose parents came begging in tears to cancel the engagement! 'No way are we allowing our daughter to marry into the Obeniel's man-eating mansion!' And that's not all. The number of people in the house has dwindled shortly after you began your experiments to the extent where it isn't even half of what it used to be! No matter how crude we are, we are still an Earl family aren't we? Ehhh!?"

"Y-Yes..."

"Do you know how much fear you brought to father? Huhnn!? Because of your poor taste in hobbies, father became sick, and also because you showed your face, father fell into critical condition, dying just like that. Did you know!? No, no, perhaps you were the one who laced his food with some unknown poison! Say it, truthfully. You were the one who killed him huh!?"

"That is quite a far-fetched accusation you made against me, brother."

He might have been affected by anxiety to some extent, but when I examined him, I could tell that he had become as gravely ill as his depraved lifestyle. After all, he had all kinds of illness caused by lifestyle like diabetes, gout, high-blood pressure and etcetera creating complications for his health. Certainly I had hoped that he would part with his fortune quickly, but still, there was no reason for me to kill a person that was already at death's doorstep.

".....What!?"

At my rebuttal, brother flew off the handle and climbed over the desk. He was completely enraged.

A clenched fist flew over. At the same time, my equipment activated automatically, and I became enveloped in a transparent barrier weaved with magic. It received brother's fist.

Nevertheless, brother did not seem to realise it and continuously rained punches on it.

"Stop feigning ignorance! You bastard! You were the one who killed him! Mother died from giving birth to you! You demon! You parricidal demon!! Just how much, how much are you going to rob me of until you are satisfied!? Answer me Talese!!!"



“Please calm down, brother. You will break your fist, y’know?”

I shrugged my shoulders and urged him. Brother finally stepped back. Blood dripped from his fist and stained the floor. My warning came too late.

“Oh dear, it can’t be helped...”

Because it can’t be helped, I decided to treat him. It was the recovery magic that I have trained to analyse up to fractures, from my long years of human experimentation. Apart from alchemy, my skills in other magics are mediocre, but I still have much confidence in it.

Since brother slightly stirred when he took my hand, I said, “Please do not move. If I make any mistake here, your bone would become crooked, yeah?”

“Shut ——”

“Well, with my surgery, I’ll get it patched right away though.”

I cautioned. He seemed to have understood and stopped fidgeting.

As soon as the treatment was done, brother swiped his hand away from me as though he wanted to protect the hand that I was holding. A reaction as though he had touched germs. Really, that was so rude.

“.....I didn’t think brother hated me this much. And this is how you repay my kindness. I shall humbly accept what you have said.”

“.....H-Humph! If you were like this from the start, it wouldn’t have turned out like this.”

Brother said as he sat on the chair once again. As expected from the head of an Earl family, he has already recovered from his rage and has, to some extent, regained his composure. His animosity towards me hasn’t changed though.

“‘From the start’? I would have wanted you to discuss this with me beforehand. So, let’s talk about the details then. I can go anywhere I like?”

“Here.”

Brother put on a sour look as he spread out a map and pointed to a spot with his finger. The name of the place was, umm. Marlin? I have never heard this name before. It was in the region of Volden, which has been the territory of the Obeniels’ for generations, and was located in a corner... it’s really a corner. Isn’t it just at the corner of the map?

It’s roughly 350 km southeast from the capital. From the perspective of a former Japanese, it would be Tohoku travelling north from Tokyo or the Lake Biwa area if travelling west.

“That’s quite far isn’t it.”

“Anyways, it is also the border with a neighbouring country. For a head of family who had just started, this would be a land in which he would want to place his most trusted men, yes?”

Such hypocrisy. It’s true that east of Marlin or east of the Volden region, which has been part of the Obeniel family for successive generations, is Sankt Gallen Federation. However, in actuality, a chain of mountains divide the two countries so the common way to pass through is further north. Not only that, as pointed out from the map, the boundary lines of the territory were wider than I imagined but it was mostly mountains and forests.

...In short, the remote countryside.

“Ahh, speaking of which... it was once famed for its rich copper deposits.”

Brother said in an effort to comfort, though it was plain as day he didn’t care about me at all.

‘Once’ was when? In any case, since he is forcing this land on me, there is no doubt that the copper veins have been exhausted and the only ones left are unprofitable.

I mentally prepared myself but this is depressing. Being forced into such a place, what in the world can I — do? Wait a sec. Land? Viscount?

It was something that I secretly looked forward to in my heart. However, brother has yet to realise it. While intentionally making dark expression, I lowered my face so as

to not be seen through, as I continued asking for more details.

“.....How about the previous prefectural governors?”

“They will be put under your command. Handle them well.”

What’s he trying to do by throwing a newbie into a sphere already dominated by vested interests?

“How about the mansion where government affairs are conducted?”

“You are allowed to build a new one. You are the sibling of a head too, it wouldn’t look good if you are using hand-me-downs from the previous prefectural governor.”

‘Allowed’ only huh. So he wouldn’t be backing me with cash huh? Is that right?

“When do I depart?”

“Tomorrow.”

Hey, hold up a sec.

His reply caught me off guard and my cheeks couldn’t help but twitch, but I endured somehow.

“.....That soon?”

“Due to hiccups like the investigation by the High Court, the succession took a far longer time than expected. Consequently, before I became the head of family, much of the governmental work in our territory froze. That is the situation we are in. In order to resume work, this has to be hurried.”

For someone who is describing a serious problem, he was enjoying himself too much. How dare he say something like that so shamelessly. And ever since father became bedridden, he took over the job to some extent.

There were many other things I want to add but I have to swallow my complaints and stay silent. This guy wants to dump the difficult problems onto me and make my life difficult. However, I don’t have to listen to his every bidding.

“Yes, I understand. In that case, since we are short of time, I will make my preparations now.”

“Wait.”

As I was about turn my heels, a stiff voice kept me in check.

“What is it?”

“You have been bestowed with peerage and even though the land is in the outskirts, you are still a person who will be managing that land. I will not allow anymore of your profligate behaviour.”

“I know. You are telling me to stop my alchemy research and lock up my underground lab, right?”

I was already planning to do so. I am not that bold a person to leave my vault full of secrets as it is.

“Good.... And, one other thing. The preparations have been made for you. I won’t accept any failures regarding the job. If you do something unpardonable, don’t blame me for making a painful decision as a brother.”

From a glance, I could see bloodthirst inside brother’s eyes.

Unlike the childish exasperation earlier, it contained a level-headed and refined purpose.

Grasp the opponent’s weakness and denounce him publicly once something happens. Use not the sword but authority to slaughter, that is the murderous intent of an aristocrat.

“.....I think I am trembling in excitement. With my meagre abilities, I will do my utmost best.”

I said and completely turned to face my back at him.

What I have been granted was a cage. A cage meant to lock out wild beasts.

Feed them some crude bait so they don't become violent from hunger, weaken them gradually and finally kill them when they expose a chink in their armour. This is what has been prepared for me.

...Still, how naïve.

That he specifically reminded me of that basically means he doesn't have the resolve to kill me.

Time is an alchemist's friend. While brother hands out his business cards and strengthens his determination, I will be able to prepare a new countermeasure.

A land that presents problems in procuring slaves. An area cut off from the cities. A place with nothing but hills, fields and forests.

What can I possibly do in a place like that? At most, it's just a place for people from the capital to go sightseeing, isn't it?

I hid my snickle, lowered my shoulders and exited. As I put up a feint, I pondered what to do with the new toy brother has given me.

Speaking of which, when was it that I had a similar conversation with father?

I left the office and by the side of the door was Yuni. Brother hates my slaves, so there was no way I could let her in. With no choice, I told her to stay outside.

"Good work, master."

"It wasn't to the extent of work. What about you? Thanks for enduring."

I said and wiped her mouth. My fingers became stained in blood. Most likely, Yuni must have resisted her instincts to barge in when brother was trying to hit me. And thus, she must have bit her lips to bear with it. There were no scars left behind since she was at least capable of healing herself.

"I am truly unworthy of such kindness."

She lowered her head deeply.



When I was studying abroad in the magic academy, Yuni had unnecessarily protected me on the spur of the moment and instead created a bigger commotion. This child is sometimes inflexible. Well, since she was able to put up with it this time, she does have the wit to not repeat her mistakes, so I doubt this would be a problem.

“Anyway, were you listening?”

As I whispered into her ears, I twisted my stained finger into her lips. Before the sensation of hitting her front tooth, my finger was wrapped in the softness of her lips and then, the finger was cleansed comfortably by her warm and moist tongue.

“Un... buhaa.... Ues, make the preparations before our departure and lock up the lab, right?”

Yuni replied while carefully wiping the finger, which has been pulled out, with a handkerchief. It might be because of the regretful parting of the finger from her tongue, that she was unable to pronounce, “Yes”. It’s not like I was doing this in the corridor during the day and there’s nothing to argue about if she used her own handkerchief. Well, this falls under skinship with subordinates. It is quite the sexual harassment, but if the other party doesn’t mind then that isn’t contradictory I guess. Yep.

“Exactly. Get them ready fast.”

“I understand.... M-01, 02, 03.”

The moment she called out, three women silently appeared and kneeled.

It’s not like I can be pleased just playing with Yuni, so I created a sound barrier on them to maintain private conversations. The barrier I created couldn’t completely shield sounds from inside, because it was a lower-class magic. However, its upside is that it is easier to conceal the existence of the barrier itself. For magic other than alchemy, I am more well versed in pony tricks like this and recovery magic. If I was better at those gaudy offensive magics though, I would use them.

“M-01, here.”

“Same for you M-02, come here.”

“You too M-03, here.”

All of them produced the same clockwork expressionless face as their names were called. On their necks were the glimmer of a silver collar. And on their bodies were the same maid attire design. Despite the differences in their facial features and physique, they were this symmetrical. It might feel eerily discomforting to others.

They were the “products” of manufacturing based on the experimental data I got from Yuni. They were the fallen products of slaves which I held expectations for. People call them (I don’t though) the M series. Incidentally, the M stands for the M in maid.... Please don’t call them cheap, that would hurt me.

Simply speaking, they were mass produced Yunis. Of course, making each and every one of them as multi-talented as Yuni would require long term training, and that would be unrealistic. Hence, applying the same technique to manipulate the mind, basic functionalities are inserted directly into the brains and later, medicine would be administered to further boost their abilities. Naturally, I have to at least configure their brains to prevent rebellion.

Their abilities on the battlefield goes no further than average, but they are more than sufficient for normal maid duties and helping with research. While we were at Sankt Gallen, these girls were good enough to entrust with the sale of potions.

Also, these girls do not have names. Unlike Yuni, the Super Dollfie of a product, the M series set forth mass productivity as the prerequisite. I don’t have such a good naming sense to name each and every one of them. For the time being, if there is an inconvenience with the lack of names, I allow them to call themselves by their real name before their restructuring.

“Tomorrow, the master has to leave. Do the preparations quickly. You know what has priority for moving right?”

“Yes, Chief Maid. According to the third emergency manual, the appropriate measure to take is to quickly move the rare C rank and above tools and materials. The rest are to be shredded and discarded.”

“A question for the Chief Maid. Regarding the raw ingredients that are currently being mixed, may I request in-depth instructions for the settings?”

“Answer to your question. Activate those that are in their final stages and have have

completed the Opus 02 setting. The rest are to be disposed of regardless of their priorities. Understand?”

“Yes, Chief Maid. We shall do as you have said.”

“Good. So then, after relaying the same message to B-01 and B-02, quickly proceed to work on your assignments. Over.”

“““Yes, Chief Maid. Over.”””

Replying in unison, the three maids from the M series backed down.

Hmm, this conversation. Rather than being in a middle century fantasy world, it was more like a modern military or a near-future dystopian science fiction. This doesn't match with current state of the world. The one who created this amusing scene was me though.

By the way, B-01 and B-02, who are not present, were a different model — the butler type B series model. Of course, B stands for the B in ‘butler’. Tough men were picked as raw materials for this series, hence, their speciality was that they were better at combat. This means that their B could stand for ‘Battler’ too. Despite being cheap, they were not much different.

In any case, I was looking at Yuni. Looking at Yuni shoot orders to her M series subordinates, from the perspective of the person who altered her brain, I can't help but feel that she has grown significantly. Gallant and imposing. That I was able to raise such a beauty was something that I couldn't imagine when I first set sights on her at the slave market. I remember noticing during the bone reconstruction operation that her bones were well-shaped, but I had no idea that it would like this after growing up.

I am experiencing the same deep stirring as I did four years ago when she was completed. Even so, no matter how many times you taste something good, they will still be good.

While I was lost in thought, Yuni looked at me with some anxiety.

“What happened, master?”

“No, nothing much. I was just thinking, Yuni is so beautiful.”

I declared without reserve. She submits to me fully. Thus, there is no need to lie. Frankly saying what I think is of no concern. Ahh, how wonderful a relationship without lies is.

Yuni blinked her eyes in a moment, but immediately bowed elegantly.

“These words are more than I deserve. I am grateful, master.”

For some reason, I felt stimulated by that reply and nodded once to her.

A perfect maid. A truly perfect maid.

I have known her for ten years. She has gone a long way to become this complete.

As long as I hold this greatest trump card, I have no need to fear something like the malice of an Earl.

I am being immersed in the feelings of omnipotence because I have my prided “product” serving me. No, this can’t do, this can’t do. I have to remind myself that letting your guard down is your greatest enemy.

# Chapter 6

## Zweihander

...It's raining.

With the leaves covering up the sky, it was as dark as the night inside the forest.

Within the darkness, the gentle and slow drips of water cruelly stole heat from an emaciated body.

—I made a blunder.

The man mumbled noiselessly.

“It seems you're quite capable. There is a difficult mountain to cross, but won't you go with me?”

Those were the words that started off everything.

The party leader who was of the same rank as him called out to him. He was a person who seeks the thrill of adventure and would travel between different cities to try something new. He talked with gusto. Something about high ranking adventurers forming an alliance— a union of party members or solo adventurers — to challenge a high-level dungeon together. Laid waiting for us there were vast rewards, rare resources, legendary treasures and formidable foes itching for a fight.

I've been making it a personal principle to be solitary and not rely on others, but being baited by the talk to help that other party was the limit of my luck. It was all good up until we got into the dungeon and took down the boss guarding the treasure. But what awaited after that was a sneaky deceit from that very same guy who sold me the talk.

Now that I reflect upon it, apart from the core members of the party, others, including me, were mostly solo adventurers. There must had been plans to cut these solo folks off once they've taken hold of the treasure. Now, it's a widely established theory that compared to adventurers similarly ranked as me, I am stronger as a lone wolf, but that's only true in a perfect world where the battles are one on one. So when they



sneakily push troublesome things on me along the road, and once I've exhausted myself they sneakily ganged up on me, at that time I couldn't resist them. On top of that, there were these folks in uniform they've had been hiding all along and they went all gung ho on me. Out of the solo adventurers joined that alliance, I'm the only one left alive.

—I was a fool.

The adventurer was a man classified as a veteran. He was still young but he has trodden in this path for very long. Born as a commoner, he sharpened his skills at the town's vigilante corps. He abandoned his seemingly unending monotone life by leaving his hometown seven years ago. If you can manage a year in this promising world, you must be sufficiently talented. Well, this is the result.

Killing fellow adventurers is a dastardly act— I should've never shown my back to fellows I know I couldn't trust. I broke my cardinal rule due to some unnecessary greed and here I am paying the ultimate price.

I crushed those turncoats in that ensuing battle. That's good and all, but as a result, I've received wounds that's definitely not shallow. I've used up all my recovery potions and what's left in my hand is only the sword I'm carrying. And it seems that I'm about to meet my vain end holding this very sword.

—To think I'd end in a place like this

Intense regret filled my chest, along with it, intense pain.

No. I don't want to end this way. Dying in a forest where there is no one, dying and turn into a skull. That's still fine by me. But there's no way I want to die in a half-assed way like this.

I want to wield my sword more! I want to master the sword more! I want to fight with my sword more!

When all I did was passing meaningless time in a certain small town, I had thought upon reaching the highest height of the art of sword. It was all I have as a man. Money, women, alcohol, food— nothing is as important to me as winning with this sword-carrying arm. I'd swing my blade in every free time I had, I'd slash my enemies with it if there's one, and never there was a day when I don't improve my skills. But this day, at this time, all of it just went to nothing.

This is too much, I thought to myself.

I have tried to build a stronghold of sword, it was like picking river pebbles and stacking them up until this very day, and now with just this one mistake, it'll collapse without a trace. How regretful I am. If the one who ended it was a master in the art then I can still accept that, but to think that it's a traitor's blade that would send this body to meet its demise, it's regrettable. What a pity.

—- I don't want to die.

Finally, the remaining regret fills the rest of my line of thoughts.

I don't want to die, ah, I don't want to die, I don't want to die.

Rely on the sword, and without being carried away, swing it. Such was the pride I've imposed on myself. Even if one tries to overturn or bend this principle of mine, all I wanted was to live singlemindedly according to it. I wanted to live more as I slash and kill under that belief while I send all dead bodies to bite the dust. If you think that's pathetic, go ahead and laugh. If you scorn me for being a man without honour, then go ahead and do that. My only honour from the beginning were only this arm and this sword of mine, anyway. I will never bear the fact that this would all be scattered away by a foolish brute who did not understand the path of the sword.

—- Let me live

—- Grant me the power to ward away these arms of Death

—- Now, for that, I'm willing to do anything

—- I'd cast away my pride, I'd sell my soul

—- Just for me to live by the sword once again!

It was at that time.

...It was then.

What he heard was the sound of horseshoe as it hit mud. And with that, the sound of wheels traversing over rough grounds.

—- A carriage?

He came to realise that he's currently on a highway. Apparently as he unconsciously crawled in dirt and hanged on to what little life he have left, he had finally cut his way through the forest. And now a carriage is coming over his direction.

With a horse's loud neigh, the carriage stopped before it could run the man over.

A figure alighted from the carriage. The ground was wet and muddy from the rain, and yet the figure made no sound as it descended.

As the man inadvertently doubt his eyes, he lets a sound.

"Huh...?"

What appeared there was a young woman.

In this darkness, the woman's white, delicate skin stood out even to his hazy eyes. The pair of eyes staring down at him was like a pair of large grain of emeralds. Fascinating as it was to behold, there was a certain coldness and rigidity in it. Her elegant features were breathtakingly remarkable. But while she possessed such an insuppressible beauty to gaze at, it was not the only thing that surprised the man.

She was wearing a one-piece dress with elaborate embroidery on the cuffs, and a white apron that seemed to shed light into the darkness of the forest. A piece of white cloth adorned her glossy black hair. On her left arm was an armband that jokingly read "*la premier servant*".

Maids. Servants that work in households of noblemen or select wealthy merchants. Why is someone like that currently here, in a rainy road by the forest, standing in front of a dying swordsman?

It was a strange sight. Certainly it isn't weird for a person that can afford to be carried in a carriage to be accompanied by a maid, but, normally if one encounters a collapsed person in injuries on the road, they wouldn't get off their carriage first and foremost. Well, he thought he was seeing things, as what he saw before him was making no sense.

The man thought he was going senile at that time, but then he came to a realisation.

—- She's carrying a sword with her.

Hanging by the woman's left hip was a sheathed sword. The make was of a double-edged blade, the width of each blade was probably about sixty centimetres. But although it was indeed a suitable weapon for ones with slender arms, it was still strange that a servant woman would carry it about.

On her left chest, over her apron, stretching over like a name tag was the adventurer guild's plate tag.

—- And that shiny silver colored thing on her neck, is it a slave collar?

A maid with a sword, and on her the adventurer guild's ID, and a proof of slavehood.

There was only one woman that meets such specific characteristic that the man knew.

““Silver Wolf’...?”

It was a rumor that he had heard in the neighboring country's capital of the Kingdom of Arquell, Broussonne. Among the adventurers based on this town, there is a certain slave-maid kept by a nobleman.

She was known by the name “Uni, The Silver Wolf”.

She wasn't one that can simply be made light as a collar-tied bitch. Her true nature was of a silver coloured cursed wolf. She was named as the sort of a hellish beast who would decapitate one without fail once she sees the other party as an enemy.

“...It has been a while since people called me that, such a nostalgic name”

To the man's words the woman replied.

Her tone was dry and inorganic, but her voice was one of a very young woman. Age can't be discerned from her extremely gracious look, but what from he observed, she was in the middle of her teens. It was all consistent with the features of the “Silver Wolf”.

“You called me with that name... Who are you?”

The woman observed the man with the likes of the watchful eyes of a hound dog.

She's strong. The man's hunch tells him so. Her height is lower than him by two heads, and she should be quite light, probably half his weight. Even so, he could feel her bloodthirst even when she wasn't actually letting out her fighting spirit, and such feeling of intimidation resonated with his wounds. Perhaps, even if he were in a perfect condition, he wouldn't get far if she were to be his opponent.

There's no mistake. The woman must be "The Silver Wolf".

With such conviction, tales of the woman's deeds floated in the man's mind.

She became an adventurer at the age of ten, and she was promoted to D-Class Adventurer within just a year.

At that time, she slayed three Class-D adventurers who insulted her master for their rudeness without giving them a chance to fight back.

After she became Rank-C, she stayed at that rank, but she was one of the few special cases, one of the two names, awarded for exceptional rate of request achievements...

But out of all those stories, this one is the best. There was this wretched party who tried to monopolise a good hunting place by driving out a few good B class adventurer out of town and occupying the town's dungeon. Then something came along and slaughtered the party in the blink of an eye and left. The Guild was caught up in it and was all like, oh good gracious, did a high-ranked monster appear there or something, it was then when one of their receptionists jokingly said:

"This monster you people are talking about... could it be, perchance, a silver wolf?"

Like that.

Just before the incident, someone said that they saw The Silver Wolf's figure heading for that dungeon.

Those stories might have been unlikely tall-tales, but here, the man's vivid sense of reality is pushing against him. The sound of rainwater mingled with the sound of cold saliva ringing through his throat. He thought to himself, so this was the sensation of holding my own breath.

To the rigid and trembling man, the woman asked another question.



“Do you wish to die?”

“Ha...?”

“If you’re not one that would bring harm to Master, he might grant you mercy, and that way your life may be saved.”

Those words caught the man’s heart.

“.....!”

Can my life be saved?

Can I avoid my death?

This woman, she said that right?

The man clinged to the hope that was reaching him like a stretched straw

“I will ask one more time, who...”

“Are you”, but her voice was cancelled out.

The man let out his true will.

“...Don’t...”

“?”

“...Don’t want, to die...”

“First, I’d like to ask who you are though...”

“...Don’t, want, to die!... I, don’t want to die, at all!”

His voice, filled with anxiety, resounded in the dark forest.

For the man who was turned a blind eye by both god and saviours, it was a desperate, pathetic plea.

But that plea seems to be granted,

“— Eh? Do you really mean that?”

There, before his eyes, was the Devil himself.

“...Master?”

The Silver Wolf looked up to the alighted man thoughtfully.

Master, she said? Is the person The Silver Wolf's lord?

He was a young man. Apparently he wasn't in his twenties yet, but while he might be in his later teens, he retained most of his youthful, boyish looks. His eyes were blue, in contrast of his red, copper hair. His facial features was all in a good order, but it didn't give off any sense of individuality. Like a cheap doll, his looks was a balanced one, one that would not invoke any impression upon a glimpse. No matter how the man him, he could only see a mediocre-looking aristocrat in front of him.

Is this awfully average-looking young man really the Silver Wolf's master?

The young man, slowly, took another step closer to approach the confused man.

“Please stand back, I have yet to discern this individual's identity.”

“Isn't he just an injured person? He seems to be an adventurer.”

“There is a possibility that he could be an assassin pretending to be one”

The woman repeated her statement to the young lord whose looking at the man without a care.

But the woman's master treated her words like a passing wind and continued to approach the man.

“Even if that's true, what can he do in this state?”

His words was full of calm confidence.

If he were another normal man, even if the other party were out of blood or in deep

wounds, even if he was in the presence of the Silver Wolf, it was an insult that could get him killed by the opponent.

But the man realised it. The ambience that the youth in front of him carried was not of a careless contempt at his half-dead self. Even if the man was in perfect condition, at the very least by no means the youth would let himself get wounded.

The Silver Wolf quietly backed down, perhaps she understood this too.

“— I have overstepped my bounds.”

“It’s fine. I don’t mind it anyway.”

While waving his hand to his servant, he crouched down beside the fallen man.

Then, he whispered with a gentle voice.

“‘I don’t want to die’. You certainly said that, right?”

“R-right”

The man responded to the question in affirmation.

“No matter what the price, you don’t want to die, right?”

“Right.”

The man responded to the question in affirmation.

“Even if your sword is turned against anyone, you still don’t want to die, right?”

“Right...!”

The man responded to the question in affirmation.

“Even if you turn into anything, you really don’t want to die, right?”

“Right!”

The man responded to the question... in affirmation.

“Don’t, want to die! I... don’t want to die!”

As if to wash away mud on his face, his tears flow.

Slush mixed in with the snot he sniffed.

It truly was a pathetic sight. Is that how an adventurer, a swordsman, supposed to look like?

Even so, no matter how unsightly it was...

“Even... even if I have to abandon my pride! Even if I have to sell my soul! Don’t want to die!... I don’t want to die!”

“— Very well.”

The Devil acknowledged his answer.

“That answer, is more important than who you are, and more than anything you have invoked my empathy.”

“Will you... help me?”

“Yes, of course... Uni, help me carry him to the carriage. I thought this was going to be a boring business trip, but it appears that I’ll be picking up an unexpected thing on my way back.”

“As Master wills it.”

“Well then, first of all I must do the emergency treatment I suppose. B-01, if you have a moment. Fetch me the following from the piled tools. Disinfectant for powerful anesthesia, bandages, splints, and haematinics.”

The young lord issued orders to the maid and the man who terribly lacked in presence.

To his profile, the man unconsciously asked,

“Hey, you... if I were to reply... ‘I didn’t say that’, then what were you planning to do?”

At the verge of his death, he accepted his obsession with life and reached out to the

first party that offered a helping hand.

If the man were to refuse the youth, what would happen then?

It was a question that he could not stop minding.

“Hmm? Let’s see... If you answered that way, then...”

And the youth indifferently returned a terrifying answer,

“— I’d grant you death that you would’ve wished for. Then I’d do experiments on your dead body.”

“...Is, that so?”

The man closed his eyelids without prying too much on the meaning of those words.

“You really don’t have anything to be afraid of, you know...? Your answer was the correct one...”

And then his consciousness sunk to the darkness.

As the men fell asleep, he prayed that the next time he woke up, he’d be alive, as his usual self.

The man’s wish will be granted, partially.

That is, even if he’ll be alive and he’ll open his eyes once more, he will not find his own unchanged.



“Ah, what fine weather...”

While holding up a hand towards the sun, I stretched myself as far as I could.

With that I deluded myself into believing that the fatigue in my joints and muscles that went through work last night melt away in the morning light.

Well, a delusion can only be a delusion. But this weather sure is comforting.



“Sure is an ideal morning to set off for a trip, don’t you think so, ani-ue?”

I said so as I look behind to the the very man who spent all night packing up my stuff.

To that word, my brother, Linus Streinn Oubeniel, returned me a radiant smile.

“Ah, that’s right Tullius. The sun sure is spectacular today, it’s suitable for the day when my little brother finally sets off from this mansion.”

“It totally is! Ahahahahaha...”

“Ahahahaha...”

Even on the day of the parting, our laugh cheerfully intertwine with each other at this time for us two brothers.

It truly was a heartwarming, wonderful sight.

Despite that, why is it for some reason the vassals’ faces that went out to send me off were all straight or frowning?

Probably it was because the exchange was full of hypocritical sarcasm, couldn’t be helped though.

“Are you all set? Well, off you go then.”

Said my brother whose face turned serious again.

His mood was unexpectedly good, I revised my evaluation at that moment.

Well, while it is better than dragging it out, I did expect a little more sensible response.

“Yes. Well then, I’ll see you later.”

“Oh my, Tullius. It’s a bit embarrassing that you used the wrong expression here at this time. You should’ve said ‘good-bye’”

“Ahahaha! Ani-ue sure is harsh. But, didn’t you use the wrong expression too?”

*TL Note: I think it’s easy to catch the subtleties in this exchange but since some meaning*

*was lost in translation I'm gonna explain anyway. What Tullius said was "ittekimasu", which implied that he'd be off temporarily and will return to the mansion. Linus corrected that by saying that he should've said "sayonara", which pretty much mean an indefinite farewell. Linus sure hates him.*

"Hm? I don't think I have another word to say to you anymore."

"Ah there you go again. I thought you wanted to say, something along the lines of, like..."

I showed and moved my lips without making a voice.

Go. To. Hell.

"— Like that, right?"

"...This bastard, ahahahaha!"

"Ahahahahaha!"

With the tension after staying up all night incessantly nonexistent for the joking me, my brother laughed casually while showing a thick blood vessel on his forehead.

Ah, that's not good. Due to what I've done, the mood over there is starting to put too much pressure on his body.

As expected being sleep-starved just won't do, so I thought while looking ways to end our conversation. But then,

"Are you brothers done with your two-people skit?"

A low brazen voice broke in.

It came to our notice that by the mansion's main entrance, a man was standing there while leaning on the doors.

His black mantle was full of holes here and there, and there were many cracks on his cuirass. The brigand-looking man was clad in tattered black. On his back, however, rested a crossed Zweihander. The intrusive atmosphered it created gave an impression that he was not an ordinary person.

*TL Note: Since the author used the word “crossed” here I’m assuming that there are two Zweihanders. But then again I could be wrong as the author didn’t mention any number. For now I’ll take the conservative approach and say it’s one.*

“...Who are you?”

My brother asked him with a rough voice. Of course. He never saw the man in the mansion even until yesterday. That said, he didn’t seem to be a person that belong in a place like a nobleman’s house.

The way my brother looked at him was a dangerous one, like at those times when he’d occasionally pick a fight with me. At this rate, he might call the guards and order them to knock him down.

I decided to stop him before that happens.

“He’s an adventurer I hired to escort me. Or not, since he’ll be working exclusively for me from now on, I suppose a former adventurer would be more proper, then?”

There was no need to spout a lie, so I told him the truth. As a response, bluntly,

“It’s not like I would mind accepting a request for another escort from you, you know that?”

He put his words in.

My brother knitted his brows.

“Wasn’t the departure order issued yesterday?”

“Indeed. I know it’s absurd of me, but he’s just the right man, he was in the neighborhood and he was acquainted with Uni. Although I felt sorry for him because my request was sudden, I decided to ask him to escort me anyway.”

To my brother my explanation may only suspicious but apparently he judged that there wasn’t a lie in my words, he humphed as he snorted.

“Apologies for my rudeness, my little brother’s guest. If possible, can I know your name?”

Although he said he was sorry, he didn't seem to be at all compunctious. Well, he's an high aristocrat and an acting Count. Probably he doesn't see the dirty-looking adventurer folk as a fellow human.

The man probably understood that as well, so after he shrugged his shoulders lightly, he asserted his name.

"Due. Due Schwarzer. Rank B Adventurer. If you're familiar with the industry, I go around with the name 'Two Handed Sword Due'—"

"Pardon me, but it's the first time I heard of that name."

Right, said Due as he let out an exaggerated sigh. My brother might have put out a request at times but probably he just went straight to the receptionist, laid out his terms and pay out the rewards. Usually noblemen would either do that or hire their own exclusive adventurers, so they wouldn't care about other adventurers.

In the first place, it's commonplace that aristocrats would see other commoners, except for those in the priesthood or a few merchants, as livestock and naturally look down upon them. Of course, they see slaves as lesser than that. If you kill a livestock, you can still get indicted, but when it comes to slaves you can actually hunt them as some sort of a prey. But as you can see from the infamy that is mine truly, it's not actually a completely accepted practice.

And so, my brother's elusive attitude pretty much falls in the category of a common sense in this world. Due wouldn't be angry. Or at least I think he won't.

"Have you finished profiling him, ani-ue? Then, Due, you get into a carriage too. I would suggest you use mine, there. There is another carriage for my escorts, but its ceiling is low and I suppose your prided sword would get stuck and we don't want that do we?"

"Alrite. Truly is an honour to accompany the new Viscount."

Due headed towards my carriage as he said that.

My brother carefully watches over his back as he went.

"To think that you'd hire an adventurer other than that girl, do you find your prided dog lacking?"

Perhaps he wasn't done with his sarcasm.

It's annoying to let him say that, but for now I'll swallow it and let it slide.

"I received a great peerage and I don't think her hands are enough to help me around. So I thought it'd be better to increase the number of hands available, else her beauty may get impaired, you see?"

The face of my brother when he heard my answer was quite a sight.



"But this sure feels weird."

As we spent a while treading the highway spanning from the kingdom's capital, Due opened his mouth.

He was stroking a part of his forehead, just above his eyebrows with one fingertip, while I was looking at the scenery outside the window.

"You said you tinkered with my head as you liked it, but what I feel is oddly refreshing. I thought there'd be more... dizziness, nausea, things like that."

"That is because I did my utmost to avoid such aftereffects."

While leaning on my cheek and leaving my body to the vibrations of the carriage, I entertain myself by talking to him.

Truthfully, I'm really, really sleepy and I can't stand it, to the point that I want to sleep all the way until we reach our inn. But the data for my new work of which I have completed adjustments upon is also valuable. As a result, I instead decided to draw out various responses from our conversation.

That's right.

The swordsman clad in black, adventurer Due Schwarz. He is the "product" of my most earnest efforts that I hadn't been doing for a while now and thus he is now my second masterpiece, Opus 2, following Uni, my Opus 1.

The remodeling given to Due to improve his abilities, compared to Uni, who were

strengthened by medication from her childhood along with growth nurtured by efficient training, took a contrasting approach.

With reference data taken from the slaves' forced remodeling procedures of mass-produced type, such as the M-Series, he was thoroughly remodeled after his body has reached adulthood. I reinforced the strength of his skeleton to optimise the placement of his muscle tissues, and improved the transmission rate of his nervous system and so on. That would make his physical ability to jump dramatically in a short period of time——— well, it should be. I don't know since I have yet to conduct the product test.

So to speak, the contrasting approach were between Uni, whose modifications took a long time by utilising medicine and training, and Due, whose remodelling surgery took a very short amount of time. Regarding which approach is better, well, probably it's better to say both of them has their own advantages and disadvantages. In Uni's case, her brain was modified during her early childhood during its developmental stage, and as a result of multidisciplinary education she has become exceedingly versatile as one individual unit. It did take time to train her, but as a result, she is now a prodigal generalist. Meanwhile, in Due's case, he has already accumulated experience in one particular field over so many years, and therefore to fully utilise this specific advantage, adjustments were made to make him a specialist. While it means that it'd be hard for him to be flexible in combat, it can be expected that he'll exceed further in his field of specialty. On top of that, as long he meets the conditions in his prime field, sooner or later the immediate disposition that he may develop will be his selling point. However, Uni still has a hidden card—

As I think about various things—

“That said, we and our lord sure are bad with people”

So said Due with a laugh and a wide grin.

“What are you talking about?”

“When you introduced me to your older brother, you see. How to say this, you did make quite the big lie there.”

“The Master did not lie, not one bit.”

Uni, who had silently been documenting our conversation in the corner, raised her

face and started to argue.

“I was the one to met you first, and your body was kept in the basement of the mansion, which means you were in fact in the neighborhood. Your final adjustments were done in haste due to our sudden departure, and thus, while it is rude to infer the Master’s will, in a way we do owe you an apology.”

Then, she continued, “though I’m being presumptuous, in my opinion that wouldn’t be necessary though.”

As expected from my childhood friend (can I call her that, though?). She understands my intention well. Certainly it was Uni who first found Due, who fell down in the way of our carriage, when we were getting back from St. Gallen after we returned the investigator. He wished to avoid death no matter what I do to him, so I remodeled him as my personal guard and he gets to hold on to his life. And of course, when I said he was around, I meant that he was in the lab, which was emptied before today’s daybreak. Just as she said, I didn’t lie when I explained it to my older brother. There were just, more or less, some missing facts.

Due opened his mouth widely and laughed.

“Hahahaha! You sure are a smooth talker, ah? Silver Wolf-san. Or would you prefer me to call you ‘senior’?”

“Call me as you please.”

“Anyway, you. It came to my attention when we met but, you sure are cold huh, senior. Is it because of that? The difference in the way our heads were tinkered, the generational gap of our surgery?”

“No. I did the same thing.”

Perhaps he misunderstood something, as he kept his jaw open.

“...Huh?”

“As I said, the substance of both her and your brain surgeries is exactly the same, I wrote obedience and eliminated hostility towards me. There were few differences in the detail, but as there are some distinctions between a man’s brain and a woman’s... But other than that, you can say that everything else is pretty much the same.”

As I finished my explanation Doue looked like a pigeon that got struck by a bean gun. That said, there are neither beans nor a thing that you can call a gun in this world yet.

*TL Note: "a pigeon that got struck by a bean gun" is a Japanese expression that can simply be translated in English as "dumbfounded", I kept it as it is as the second sentence would make no sense if I were to simply translate it in that way.*

"After all, if you tinker the brain too much, there would be more demerits, you see? Especially in Uni's case, I went into the trouble to educate her from her childhood while raising the basic performance of her brain tissues. I can't afford to mess up with it, that's just stupid, right? Well, in the case of the mass production types, I require uniform performance from them, there's however a considerable restriction on their emotion due to that though."

"Eh? then... then, basically, their personality is like that of the mass-produced type over there? This guy here."

That's right. To simply put it, it's an archetypal character which I educated, restrained, and trained in its entirety.

"Uwaaah. I can't believe it."

"As for me, I can't believe how insolent you are. Master, I propose another readjustment to implement alterations on his language field later."

"Oi, oi, give me a break here, senior."

"Give him a break, Uni. Think about it, reservedly speaking, Due may look a bit scruffy, but he's terribly punctilious and behave with an excellent standard of conduct."

"...I see. Indeed someone that can still tremble in fear would be quite the spectacle. For failing to see Master's farsightedness, my humblest apologies."

"Don't think emotions like that as an appeal, okay!?"

Seeing Doue splendidly playing the straight man and Uni being a little more talkative than usual, I felt my cheeks a little bit loosened.

As he is capable to express rich emotions, it's safe to say that there's no sequelae after his surgery.



...It was when I indulged in that feeling,

“Uwah!”

“Master?!”

“Whoa there!”

Suddenly, with the horse’s loud neigh, my body swayed greatly and I was thrown out from my seat. Fortunately, thanks to Uni who quickly caught me, there’s no problem here. No, even though she left it like that, I won’t get injured as I’m wearing this dress.

I stroked Uni’s head in exchange of a word of thanks, then I let go of her, returned to my seat and asked away,

“B-01, what happened?”

“There’s a raid, Master. Perhaps it is a bandit troupe.”

Bandit raid. Not at all an impossible situation. It’s because of this there’s the escort business between adventurers and individuals in this world.

For a moment, I thought for a moment that this might’ve been instigated by my brother, but considering yesterday and today, this hastiness just doesn’t suit his preference nor his principle. It’d be reasonable to consider this as a coincidence.

“Even though we’re still very close to the kingdom’s capital, they sure are brave. Do they fear not the knight order’s patrol?”

The Royal Capital is just around the corner. And we’re within the reach of the Royal Guard, the kingdom’s finest. Their force can cut off the likes of a bandit hands down.

“Perhaps it’s the type of bandit that regularly move their base.”

Uni supplemented a conscientious remark as a response to my monologue. As expected from a titled adventurer. Up until a few years ago, she must’ve done this kind of thing with her clients.

“I see. So they quickly rob valuable things and depart as quickly before they can get caught by the authorities. I suppose they’d repeat this in every place they go?”

“Indeed. In order to maintain simplicity, they typically wouldn’t negotiate or abduct for ransom. In their case they would simply kill everyone and take away the goods.”

Damn you, historical plays. A murder-robbery like in my previous world? Certainly, if there’s an emphasis on time constraints, it is quicker to kill everyone and take their goods away.

As expected, I just can’t keep my calm when dealing with these kind of people. In a fit of annoyance I scratched my head a little roughly.

“To think this’d happen on my day of departure. Sigh—”

—- Is this luck, or misfortune...?

With that implicit remarks in mind, I looked at the untested “product”, who currently is standing by for orders and is raring to go.

# Chapter 7

## The Contractor's Price

The sky was clear blue.

The sun was in its highest altitude in the sky, it was noontime.

A major highway that spread all over from the kingdom's capital, Broussonne. The jurisdiction of the Royal Guard, the finest knight order in the country honoured with the duty to defend the Royal Capital. With them being a stone's throw away, who the hell would do something like a robbery?

Nonetheless, there's an exception to everything. To put it the other way, on this arterial road that's responsible for goods circulation in the kingdom, prosperous trade caravans with great appearance come and go, and thus it is a great hunting ground. While the merchants has been assured by the authority of the Royal Guard, if you put your fangs in an exposed, unprotected flank, you'd get to taste this delicious sap that you can't get anywhere else.

It goes without saying but, if you just strike without giving it a thought, you'll inevitably meet the misery of being quickly dispatched by the Royal Guards and you'll have no time to flee. Therefore, one would have to combine the intellect to understand how things work in the vicinity of the Royal Capital to avoid the present threat that is the Royal Guards' patrol time, the patience to wait for the gaps and the passing of a prey to overlap, and the swiftness to finish the act before the authorities notices and reinforcement arrives.

"Chief!"

Along with an agitated call for their chief, the bandits begun their work.

While threading through the woods along the highway, the scouts responsible for observing the Royal Capital's vicinity raised their voices and cantered their steeds. They were lacking strength and bravery, but they were tactful, on top of being well-versed in horseriding. It was actually because of this that they were able to breeze through the offroads. Truly, they were men who were born to do reconnaissance work.

“Yeah, what is it!?”

The horsed scout’s call was met with the chief’s deep bass voice.

The scout was grouped with a cowardly and crude bunch within the troupe, but the chief was highly appreciative of this man. The man was originally a slave that was bought by a rancher, but after his master’s sudden death he struck his collar and fled on horseback before his master’s successor could get a hold on him. The chief thought that he might turn out to be the bravest man in his troupe, so he picked him up. So this’d be a report from this dear, still-incompetent-but-shows-promise, subordinate of him. Maybe he caught a big one or something, the chief thought so in anticipation without showing it on his face.

“Chief, there’s a prey! A nobleman’s carriage is passing through the nearby highway! There are two freight wagons! They are coming this way!”

The answer was beyond the chief’s expectations.

While holding his cheek which was seemingly about to fall off with one hand, he asked him one more time just in case.

“A nobleman’s carriage? You sure? And they have no cavalry escorting them?”

“Yes! There’s only the carriage! The frght wagons are loaded with cargo, and even if there’s people in there their number should be few! Their number wouldn’t exceed ten!”

The chief could not suppress his smile anymore at that time.

A nobleman was rushing through the highway without being guarded by a cavalry, and there’s a lot of cargo in its freight wagons tagging along. It’s pretty much like a beautiful lady walking naked by the pool. It’s a marvelous prey.

Other members were also excited.

“OOOH! Three days after holding it off on the highways, today’s finally the day we get to hunt our prey!”

“Moreover, it’s a shitty nobleman, this is just the best! We sure do have a lot of grudges stacking up against ‘em!”

The members were imploring the chief to start the raid.

But there was one newcomer amongst them who quietly said,

“But... if it’s really THAT loaded, I just can’t believe it’s so lightly guarded. Can it be that, they just hired an incredibly skilled adventurer?”

To that word, the troupe went silent at that very moment.

The ones they call “adventurers” are some sort of a bunch of lunatics. They are the ones who fight monsters who are deemed to be a threat to humanity, and as they train themselves with those battles, the battles shape them up. Some of them can single-handedly eradicate a small-time bandit troupe.

And if someone so skilled were really present there, it’d be a very difficult task but—  
—

“...Kuhuhu”

“...Hahaha”

“...AHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

They were all old-timers who managed to live through battles against those kind of people.

“Hah! You, if you don’t know a thing about adventurers, then don’t say it.”

“Yeah yeah, their strength depends a lot on their party’s cooperation, right? If the scouts weren’t mistaken, the amount of people there is only ten at most. But these noblemen sure are pretentious, they sure do bring a lot of vassals with them!”

“If we take those people out from the ten, then there are probably two or three adventurers with them. No matter how strong they are, our numbers are far superior! Even if we can’t win on numbers alone, we can just wring them out and nail them down by targeting their escort objective.”

That’s how it is.

There certainly are adventurers who could crush a band of bandits with just a handful

of people, there's also amongst them who could do it solitarily. But that's only true if it were a situation like subjugation where they are in the offensive. But since they'd be in an escort mission, they would be forced into a defensive position, and unless they are a party of at least five or six they would have a hard time noticing everything. Even if there were adventurers who would accept an escort mission with such a small party, they must be either a bounded fool who would've thought that they wouldn't get robbed if they pass through road or an unqualified outcast. No threats there.

Then, what if it was an adventurer that actually has the confidence to pull the job off? It's common sense that they would receive more favourable quests from the guild in the first place, that's why there's a rank system for adventurers anyway. A prized nobleman and a menacing adventurer. For the old timer troupe who have the complete knowledge of their habits, even for those who fancy themselves as a very cautious person, it would be the height of folly if they were to let this chance slip by. It would be nothing but sheer stupidity. The chief thought so as well.

"Yeah, that's why this is a rare chance. This'll be one hell of a job. That's why to any extent I can't forgive any error here. Why don't you quietly observe how us old timers do it and learn properly!?"

Watching the youngsters innocently voiced their stiff replies was like staring at the sun that was hanging on the sky at that time.

The time was just after noon. According to the information bought from the frequenting peddlers, the knights were about to take their lunch. No one would disturb them for a while.

"...It's time! Time limit is exactly half! Anything more than that means the knights' patrol would come! Quickly kill them and take their stuff!"

*TL Note: you read that right, the raw only says "half", which can mean half a minute, half an hour, half a day, or half whatever arbitrary time measurement standard these people use. Though speaking realistically it's probably half an hour.*

"OOOOOOOOOH!"

As to vent out their frustration after having had to wait repeatedly for their big heist in the capital's vicinity, the band raised a shout to voice their desire to get the loot they would get after the job.

“Well then, we’ll be killing a nobleman, and later their vassals’ response will be scary. I must carefully decide an escape route now...”

While watching his subordinate jumping out to the highway like a pack of wolves, the chief was full of such calculations.

The unprotected party that was heading over would surely enough have something ridiculous with them.



“Ora, ora! Get the hell out you worthless noblemen!”

“You guys, don’t get dazzled by those horses! Kill it, stop it from its track!”

“Take out your precious stuff, quickly!”

They could hear incessant calls of intimidation from outside the carriage window, The numbers of bandits that attacked them seemed to be considerably large. There were at the very least no less than twenty people. If they can pull an ambush with a large number of people like this, what has become of the security here near the capital?

“There are about thirty of them, right?”

“Thirty two, to be exact. Correction. Due to B-01’s counterattack, they are now reduced to thirty one.”

So calmly stated by the two escorts... Yes, unfortunately my analysis doesn’t seem to be reliable in battlefields.

*TL Note: the original word for “this sort of place” in the raw was 鉄火場, tekkaba, which the dictionary defined as “a gambling den”. But that came out weirdly. If you take apart the kanji in it it’d mean a “field of red hot iron”, which would be a little more appropriate. But in the end I used simple interpretation instead. Credit to Wyr for translating this one into “battlefield” instead.*

Well it’s not like I’m not ashamed of the fact, but, to put it into words, “you should get mochi in a mochi store”. I should pull myself together and ask Due, who seems to be brimming with motivation.

*TL note: the proverb pretty much means, "if you want the best result, then go to a specialist/expert."*

"By the way, how confident are you?"

The he fearlessly smiled,

"Oi, oi, Milord. Even if I look like this, I'm actually on top of Rank B, y'know? As long as your remodeling doesn't get in the way handling bandits of this degree would be just like a walk in the park."

He gave me a reassuring word.

Now that I reflect upon it, it was a stupid question.

Bandit subjugation is a typical quest given to parties ranked E to C. The reason why the quest is given to a wide range of ranks is because the nonuniformity of a bandit troupe's size and nature, but putting it away on that part—and there's Rank B, amongst them there are those who are very close to be ranked as A-Class adventurers, and these people can undertake subjugation requests that normally would require a few ranked-C class adventurers all alone. In the discovered data before Due's remodeling in the laboratory, Due was evaluated as indeed belonging to the top tier in the B-Rank. There were neither exaggerations nor fabrications in his words.

"So that means, despite there being the disadvantage of being on escort duty, this degree of enemies is nonetheless ideal for the test?"

"I humbly agree with your highly reliable judgment."

Uni issued her endorsement, too. Then there's no problem. No reason to hold the green light off now.

"Fine, Due. It's a bit sudden, but this'll be your real battle test. While guarding our horses and luggages, eliminate all of the enemies. The mass-produced ones can fend for themselves so you can leave them as they are."

"Are you going to use these guys as materials for your experiment?"

"Thank you for your thoughtfulness, but I'm afraid there's no means to transport them. Besides, if I, a new lord, were to bring these bandits into my territory, that wouldn't



look good now, would it?"

"No doubt there... Well then—"

The nature of Due's smile changed.

Added to his fearless and confident mad smile were murderous intent and battle spirit.

"Just, as you ordered! You want total annihilation, right?"

While carrying a two-handed sword that gave him his nickname in his hands, wrapped in black armor and tattered mantle, my second masterpiece jumped off the carriage.

Well then, what will the endgame be? Let me carefully observe.

---

The bandits were bewildered, they should've attacked an unescorted carefree aristocrat but the reality was out of line with their preconceived outcome.

First of all, they have sent several people to stop the horse's feet, they stretched a rope as a trap to stop the horse's movement on its tracks. But the driver of the leading carriage apparently saw through it and stopped immediately. The following freight wagons also stopped immediately, as if they were in sync. It was a splendid show of preemptive evasion there.

In addition, the drivers of the carriages were all curious existences.

Despite their road being blocked and being surrounded by more than thirty people, they didn't show any emotion. But that was still fine. Before, they had demonstrated the capability to see through the bandits' traps, avoided it and handled it immediately. So such was to be expected from these definitely-not-ordinary people.

But, their appearances were strange. They were dressed in those fine black butler clothes, and that was fine, but winded on— no, fixed on their necks was a silver collar. It was a cursed trinket commonly known throughout the continent as a slave symbol.

"...Slave coachmen...?"

All the bandits who saw that had a question mark over their heads. Naturally, aristocrats are creatures that wear vanity like some sort of a cloth and walk around with it. For positions like coachmen or butlers that are typically seen as the face of a noble house, it's customary for junior noblemen to employ commoners or their affiliates. But when you're going to other noble houses, you can't do that. In other words, your surroundings will despise and reject you. It's almost as if it can be said that you're betraying origins. To put it shortly, for aristocratic societies that deem pride and tradition as their bill of exchange, it was a serious fault that could be a blunder.

"Oi, oi, can it be that?... A piss-poor noble's daytime flight, because they couldn't flee by nighttime?"

"Now that is just a masterpiece, isn't it? But, that means I can't get shit from this job?"

With that conversation opened, their confusion turned into contempt.

And as if to make things worse,

"Look! That one other wagon, there, they made a maid to hold its reins!"

"She's a slave too! Oh hell there ain't no money to find here!"

"Hehe... her face sure gets me going though."

Such conversation came from those who were heading to the back rows.

As it turned out like that, no one was able to keep their spirit after they felt that they had been tricked.

A nobleman, accompanied by only slaves, was leaving the capital without being guarded by cavalry. Someone like that must have fallen from grace and hence fled from the capital. The gains from the operation would be much lower from prior expectations, but— there was another freight wagon that seemed to be fully loaded even when seen from a distance. Perhaps it was the last of the noble's properties. If they were nobleman's furnitures, even the lowest grade amongst them would have a significant value, there were also slave maids that can't be sold without much problem. It was certainly a disappointment, while it wasn't exactly a big loss, it was pretty close to that...

That was the inference that the bandits drew.

“...Ora, what are you standing there for, you bastards! Things we must do here don’t change much! Kill the men! Deal with the horses! Tie up the maids!”

“Chief! What if there were other women inside?”

“If she’s a maid, then take her to sell. If she’s the nobleman’s wife or daughter, they’d probably be heavy and there’s no way to take them so just kill them on the spot. Then you get to fuck women or taste some goods with the money from the gain of selling them... Got it?”

“Yea, yea!”

These women would normally be called as “unattainable flowers”, but even if you try to sell them no store would take them, and even when they do, that’s when you’ll get traced. Even if you try to take them as a hostage for ransom, most noblemen wouldn’t sit down and negotiate with the likes of bandits. With that also, taking them would take too much time and they wouldn’t successfully flee if their vassals decided to give a chase.

Consequently, you should just take only the things you can deal with, if you can’t then cut them off. You wouldn’t be able to escape easily with excessive baggage on your back. A woman is a particular reason for an inferior troupe to destroy itself. If you can’t sell the woman, don’t lose to your desires and don’t kidnap them, you should man up and kill them there. That was the secret to remain in the robbery business for a long time.

The once-dampened bandits rekindled their desires and started to attack the carriages. Their first target would be the horses, their feet must be struck in order to let no one escape. Led by a hunter wannabe in the troupe, they readied their bow hand, pulled their bowstrings and released their arrows.

It was at that time.

“B-01, now entering self-defense mode.”

“B-02, now entering self-defense mode.”

“M-01, now entering self-defense mode.”

“M-02, allied engagement into combat confirmed. Commencing support.”

“M-03, allied engagement into combat confirmed. Commencing support.”

The slaves began their counterattack.

“”Huh?””

Again, confusion and bewilderment struck the bandits.

As they thought that the drivers’ arms looked hazy, the arrows that were released to shoot down the horses and the men were all knocked down. They used their second, then third arrow, but the result was the same. All of them were warded off. As if it was a magic trick.

The first amongst the bandits that realised what the drivers’ held in their hands widened his eyes in surprise.

“T-they ward off the arrows with a whip?!”

A long whip to hit the horse from the driving seat. That was the identity of what intercepted the arrows.

But sure enough their common sense couldn’t take it as how it is.

“D-don’t be stupid! It’s a bloody whip? Just by using a thing to hit a horse, they can stop this number of arrows... who the hell can do such a thing?”

“You just saw someone did it! Heck, it can’t be, all three of them can do it?”

“Archers, aim more! You guys haven’t ran out, right?”

Such a thing couldn’t have happened. As they turned their eyes from reality, the bandits again ordered their archers to ready their bows.

But then,

“...B-01, commencing counterattack.”

The couchman of the first carriage threw something from inside pocket in advance.

Something flew with a speed that couldn't be perceived by naked eyes.

"Uwah!? Agh... guh..."

"Oi, what happe—— hiiiih!?"

Something stuck on of the archer's skull.

It was a throwing knife.

The fact that most of blade was stuck inside gave off how quick it was when it flew.

Its damage had surely reached the brain. It was an instant death.

The dead body, with a slight delay, slowly fell to the ground. As if it had just realised it was already dead.

"Now you did it, you bastard!"

"Shit!... If projectiles can't do the job, then just behead him to kill him! Strike him to kill him!"

The death of their fellow member had an impact on them. And now to turn that impact into an impulse to attack, the bandit chief shouted so.

But it was too late.

—— The door of the carriage opens.

"Wh——"

Before the questioning voice could finish itself, blood splashed up.

The highway dust was blown away by a black gust.

At the time it jumped off the carriage, another one died.

That was the limit of their understanding.

They couldn't perceive the moment of attack this time too.

It wasn't reflected in any of the thirty pairs of sixty eyes.

"Huh...?"

When they finally able to realise it, there was a man clad in black, he was still in the posture of having just swung his sword.

As if to check its response, the man fixed the sword's grip, two, three times.

It was as if he wasn't at all concerned that he could be slashed or hit from the back.

...Was it this guy who killed him?

The bandits had just perceived it only now.

"Not enough warm up, eh... Looks like the adjustments weren't that effective."

When he killed one of them as he appeared, it was as if he had cut a bundle of straw.

As if being struck by fear, the besieging encirclement was pushed from the inside.

The man who appeared seemed to be an adventurer.

He was a tall man. His build, rather than simply big, seemed to be irresistibly tough.

A black mantle. A black cuirass. And a long two-handed sword.

Everything of him was crude. Just now, something peeled off from the remains of his weather-beaten attire. But the bloodlust that seeps from the cracked black iron was something else. As if he was an evil dead spirit that roams around old battlefields.

They finally understood that it was someone they shouldn't have encountered.

"Gyah!"

"S— Stop—!"

Strange shouts unbecoming of a man broke the stagnation as they echo. And they were coming the bandits.

If you see it now, even the slaves that were dressed in butlers' and maids' uniform were handling some of the bandits.

The man noticed that and clicked his tongue.

“— Hold it.”

With just that one command, he stopped anyone who had the intent to pursue the bandits.

Why?

Such question branched out before any sense of relief.

He daringly ordered a halt before those who were raiding them and out for their blood. What was the reason for that?

Was it to negotiate? Did he show his power to use it as a leverage and force them to withdraw that way?

If so, for those who were being dominated by terror and confusion beyond what they could accept, this was a supreme glad tidings.

However,

“I'll be using these guys to warm up. You guys, just quietly stand back and protect the carriages.”

The reality of it was heartless.

The man pretty much said that he'll be their match, in other words, he was out to kill them.

As the bandits trembled before his declaration, the slaves dropped their stance.

“B-01. Confirmed the commencement of battle test for superior unit, Opus-02. Now shifting to passive defense mode.”

“B-02. Likewise.”

“M-01 to 03. Likewise. Over.”

“Yeah, yeah, over, over.”

After he uninterestedly finished his incomprehensible exchanges with the slaves, the man raised his sword for the second time.

The bandits were all bent back in hesitance.

As the man slightly advanced and took a step, the bandits took another ten back.

Looking at that, the man sighed in disappointment,

“Oi, oi, can’t help it huh... Guess I’ll just slash your fleeing backs as a warmup... Oh, that’s right.”

As if he came up with something crafty, the man raised the edges of his mouth.

He raised his voice so everyone in the field could hear him.

“Oi, you people! Why don’t we do this instead? If you can kill me, you can safely leave this place. You can take the slaves with you while you’re at it.”

“Huh—?”

“W-what did you say—?”

The bandits were again confused, but the man uncaringly carried on,

This time he turned his face towards the carriage from whence he came out.

“You’re okay with that, right, Milord?! It’s only this much!”

“You’re asking for an ex post facto approval, and I can’t be pleased with it.”

From the door of the carriage, another slave-maid appeared.

Some people forgot that they were in the brink of their life and held their breath. The slave was that sort of beauty.



The maid carried on,

“However, the master has generously forgiven you and said, ‘I’ll leave it to you, so feel free to do your test’. Please be sure to seek approval first next time.”

“Thought so.”

The maid who was finished talking returned to the carriage, the man intensified his smile.

The bandits were all,

“G, GET HIIIIIIIIIIIIIM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

With the chief’s inside-out scream as their order, they went for the man.

There were twenty-four of the bandits remaining.

The noble’s party consisted of seven people as far as they could confirm, but only one would participate in the battle.

It was the beginning of a curb-stomp battle, it was for the fewer against the many instead, however.



Here, let us move to the point of view of one of the bandits. He was the first one who discovered Tullius’ group, the one with the magnificent riding skills.

(“Why—”)

He held his head as he crouched inside the bushes.

He had disobeyed the chief’s order, he secretly hid without challenging the man, and now he found himself frightened.

(“Why—”)

In the first place, he never wanted to be a bandit.

It all began when his family sold him as a slave, then due to miraculous luck he could free himself from his slave status. However, even when he was finally free, for him there were no place to go. So he got picked up by a troupe of bandits while he was wandering around with the horse he took when he escaped.

The chief took him in for his riding skills and his eyesight, but for him, such expectations were nothing but a seed of trouble that have made his surroundings to be jealous of him.

Nonetheless, he chose to follow them anyway because he had no other means to live.

He knew that his orders would make him die in his teens, so he didn't really want to obey.

("Why—")

In his sight as he looked up, the sight of a bandit attacking the man in black only to die instead was repeating itself.

No matter how many of their colleagues die, the others would continue to do the same thing and follow after their dead colleague.

The scene was beyond what the boy could ever imagine, and he refused to try to understand it as well.

He once heard that in a land further south, once in a dozen of years a group of rats who ate too much bait would somehow eventually go insane due to extreme starvation and drown themselves in the seas or the lakes. Now he couldn't help but to recall that rhetoric which he haven't actually seen for himself.

("Why—")

One of the bandits jumped at the swordsman in black.

— Like cutting a bamboo apart.

His dead body was cleanly split apart from his head to his crotch into two, his innards scattered and fell to the ground.

One of the bandits jumped at the swordsman in black.

— A cut slantwise to his shoulder.

The contents of his bisected corpse, like that of a crushed pillow, flew somewhere else.

One of the bandits jumped at the swordsman in black.

— His abdomen.

His corpse was divided from his belly, his intestines jumped out and wrapped itself on his companion's body.

...The man, the swordsman in black, was indeed on a trial.

And true to that word, one by one. Carefully, carefully. To affirm his varied set of skills, he slashed and killed everyone in a different manner. And each time he killed another one, his skillful swing was nothing but a nightmare fuel.

("Why—")

For what reason did he continue to kill?

For what reason did the others continue to try just to get killed?

The answerless questions kept going around and around inside the boy's head.

But the biggest question was not of the swordsman, who kept killing, nor his companions, who kept getting killed.

Truthfully, he didn't care much for either.

The question that confused him so was...

("Why—")

As things stood, the man continued to slaughter the bandits.

There, standing by the side of the wagons, were the slaves who would beat down those who occasionally were trying to flee and send them to the man to be dealt with.

And amongst them,

("Why, are you, there!?)

Was his younger sister, who got separated from him when they were sold as slaves.



It began five years ago.

This country— the land of black soil and fine arts, the Kingdom of Arquell, the continent's largest agricultural power, is by no means free from cold and drought. No, if you go to the rural areas, you'd find that the nobles, who are mostly far away from the capital's control, run their territories arbitrarily. Heavy tax, forced labour, neglected home affairs. Something like a peasant famine can happen over and over again. The boy's village was in one of such territories that the corrupt lords govern.

That year, cold summer struck, and as a result barley yields have fallen to an unprecedented degree. Impacted by that event, the boy's house was forced to pay a tax while they were themselves in a troubled position. His poor parents sold two of their children, who were guaranteed to be able to work, and were around the ideal age that could sell the highest as a slave, to a slave merchant. These two children were him and his sister.

As they were crammed into a wagon, on their shaky journey, the boy and his sister kept encouraging each other, 'if our luck is good, then we'd be bought by the same master'. But once they reached the capital Broussonne's slave market, the siblings were heartlessly separated into different departments. She has had a rare magic latency, and appearance-wise, she has good looks, even from the biased eye of his as her brother. He, meanwhile, seemed frail for a boy, so he was sent to a certain narrow strip on the storefront to be sold as cheap as possible due to his circumstances.

He was later told by his jailer that his sister was bought by a certain Count house at a surprisingly good price. The jailer, who apparently found his purpose of life in torturing the helpless, told him that the children in that Count house were sick bastards that kill their slaves every so often, and that while his sister was dragged by another slave from that house, she was crying and calling for me until the very end. The jailer let him hear such narration with great joy on his part. The boy was enraged and began to uncontrollably hit his cage door. He got himself beaten by a whip repeatedly after that.

*TL note: Original word was senior slave (senpai dorei, 先輩奴隸), to indicate the slave was bought by the house earlier than her sister. It's a bit hard to translate to english, so I changed it a bit.*

Shortly after that, he was sold to the owner of a large ranch. His master pretty much loved him, just in the way that would make oneself hold their breath in nausea, however. In the days, he would take care of the livestock day from dawn to dusk, and in the nights, he would be taken to his master's bedroom. Every night he would be dirtied by the same smell that stained the sheets. He would be ordered, with the force of his obedience seal, to lick a certain bitter liquid, along with every finger on both of his master's hands and feet, countless times. That master of his was suddenly struck by intense agony during his nightly routine and died all too soon. Despite being so out of shape, he continued to unreasonably exert himself and so he was caught by a heart attack he secretly had. He pretty much asked for it.

The boy realised that the clamp of his collar went loose soon after his master's death, and so he struggled to get rid of it, and then his body was finally free. The first thing he did when he achieved his freedom was to spit on his terrible master's corpse, then he took a horse that he had under his care and set off from the ranch—— while he was wandering he was later picked up by the head of a bandit troupe by chance, which lead to the present.

He thought his sister was already dead. Considering the place she was sold to, she was bought by a noble who was known to engage in slave-killing, and he had no choice but to think that she must have had been exposed to a crueller fate than he had.

Unlike other people who sold themselves and said it was for the sake of their family or their village. For him, his sister, who spent rough and painful times and shed the same tears together with him, was his only genuine family. And that boy, with a weary heart, paralysed by intense feeling of sadness, had finally accepted her passing.

That is how it was supposed to be.

And yet there she was, his sister, who he thought was already dead, with her body still alive and well, staring at him with her deathly eyes...



The battle— no, the massacre was finally over.

Human remains were scattered under the clear, noon sky.

The swordsman in black had suppressed all of the bandits without getting a single wound. Anyone who tried to escape was either taken down by the slaves or slain from the front as the swordsman overtook them.

The only one left was the boy.

The swordsman was staring at the boy. Although he had crouched himself in the bushes, for some reason he was looking straight at him. There were no killing intent nor fighting spirit from him, but there were no signs of mercy or tolerance that could be sensed from him either. The slaves were also looking at him.

If he tries to run away, he'd be cut down. He unconsciously realised that, but he didn't know what might become of him if he decided to come out right there.

He was at loss as to how to advance at this point. His mind was loaded by the fact that his life was now on the hands of the unknown slaughterers. There was no space for him to try out what he could do with his own powers.

Then, at the very least...

“ ... ”

With his feet trembling, he stepped into the highway.

The swordsman kept his eyes on him still. His eyes were somewhat lethargic. The exhilaration he had when he struck the bandits have already went elsewhere, and now it seemed to be embracing some sort of emptiness. There was no tension that would make him strike the boy and kill him right now.

But that was no time to be relieved, and then the boy approached one of the collared maids.

No attack was directed against him.

“...Emily?”

For the first time in what had been a long span of years, he muttered his sister's name.

He called the inorganic person with her former name, without all that “M, Zero, Three” thing.

There was a slight reaction. The shoulder of the collared girl dressed in maid outfit trembled ever so slightly.

“You're Emily right?”

He called the name one more time.

The girl returned his gaze.

With a veil covered her head. Like seeing a lie, her eyes, that were as blue as the clear skies, reflected the boy's face.

Her facade was beautiful. When he was a child, he had thought that the girl would grow into a beautiful woman. She grew even prettier than what he had imagined at that time.

But the light in her eyes, that was just a lie. It was so out of place in her beautiful face. That made the boy sad.

“It's me, Luc.”

He told her his name, his voice trembling.

His sister's expression was as serene as a winter lake.

There, he saw small ripples fluctuating about, was it an illusion?

“M-02 to M-03. Requesting response to the following query. What is the identity of the individual presently in contact with you?”

One of the maids threw a question while staring at the boy. Her eyes were cold. It was almost like she was looking at an insect, and for a short moment it seemed to be trying to figure out whether she'd better pinch and crush the insect or let it escape. Her

actions had the impressions of a screw-wound clock. Like a machine that only performs predetermined movements according to the force it had loaded. His sister too was apparently treated as that sort of mechanical, hollow tool. At that fact, the boy felt his anger, and fear, rushing in.

“.....”

Her sister didn't answer. Perhaps she couldn't answer.

“M-02 to M-03. Repeating query, response requested. What is the identity of the individual presently in contact with you?”

Towards the repeated question, the sister's body shuddered.

She corrected her posture in an attempt to subdue her shuddering, and slowly opened her mouth.

“...M-03 to M-2. Responding to query———”

“...E, Emily?”

The boy trembled. The insides of his chest were coloured with anxiety and expectation.

Will she recognise him as her brother now?

Or will she end up like the other mechanical maid standing nearby her?

And the result was,

“—— He is my older brother.”

She remained to be his sister.

“A.....”

Tears ran over the boy's cheeks.

The tears were warm, unlike the other tears he had flown before that was mixed with his cold sweat.



She remembered.

It never changed.

That one thing, the fact that she was his sister.

“M-03. Submitting proposal. The threat level of the remaining target is estimated to be level E. Target deemed insufficient for a battle test. Proposing to conclude the test and collect the remaining subject.”

“M-02 to Opus-02. Judgment required.”

“Hah? Me?”

The swordsman, who was suddenly drawn into the problem, violently scratched his head.

The boy, with his battered body, continuously shifted his gaze between the swordsman and his sister.

Will you, help me?

“Certainly he won’t be much of a match, and I’ve grown tired of this pointless killing... Oi, Milord! What do you think!?”

He raised his voice towards the carriage.

The boy couldn’t fathom how things were progressing.

—– what happened to my sister?

—– in the end was I really saved?

—– So, can I and my sister be happy now?

Several thoughts ran around inside his head.

And there was,

“Oi, oi... why are you passing this to me there?”

Before him, there stood true fear.

“Ah...”

Even his trembling went into a freeze.

...What, is this?

Along with the figure of the maids' head, while being cared by the slaves, a man descended from the carriage.

His physique was mediocre. Nothing can be said about his face. He didn't have any frightening weapons.

All he did was just stand there, and that already made the boy feeling sick.

From all things that happened to him, in his mind this was the absolute worst.

The time when he was torn down by a bully in the village. When he was scolded by his parents as he wasn't able to work in the field due to his frailness. When he and his sister were sold to slavery, the abject pity and the menial sense of superiority that were directed at them. The treatment of his slaver and jailer. The parting with his sister. Every single day when he was sold to the ranch. Rough life after the bandits picked him up.

Add them all up, and multiply them by a hundred. It was that sort of an overwhelmingly terrible feeling.

“HIIH...!??”

“Let me see, let me see?”

Without minding the frozen boy, the man quietly observed him.

As he looked at the man's eyes, he realised it.

This guy is actually a monster. The village bully, adults, officials, nobles, merchants, his former master, the bandit troupe... they had always been trampling on him from as long as he could remember, but at the very least his guts could recognise that they were really themselves.

It's a monster that couldn't live unless it is trampling down on something. Even if the world is completely filled to the brim with wealth, honour, power, knowledge, love, dreams, hope, it's still a creature that couldn't live unless it makes a sacrifice out of something.

A genuine scum. Such was his true identity. The only people who could accept this thing would only be its victims which it had twisted around so they belong to it.

The boy couldn't put what he felt into words. But he could still understand it.

He must have come to terms with this blasphemous, human-shaped, speaking piece of shit.

"Well, I don't really mind."

Words he couldn't understand flew over his head.

"I've gathered enough relevant data, and killing him isn't the only way to seal his mouth... If you're not in the mood to kill, then I don't mind if it's just taking this one you left alive. It's troubling that he stands out, but, if you can take care of the trouble before his treatment, then I don't really care... Okay, M-03?"

With that said, the man gave his sister his permission.

The sister responded with some sort of salute.

"Thank you so much for your leniency, Master."

"M-02 to M-03. Congratulations. Thank the master, for he has bestowed mercy upon petty beings like us."

"M-01, likewise."

"B-01, likewise."

"B-02, likewise."

Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap.

What is this dry noise? Applause? The slaves' applause?

He felt like throwing up. It was almost like a vulgar puppet show. The dolls, that were made of humans, were honouring their shithead of a creator for its erratic favour, and the farce was carried out in the worse possible way.

The boy couldn't hold off from vomiting.

"What is it, Luc-niisan?"

"Emily..."

"When in front of the staff, please call me M-03. Are you feeling sick somewhere?"

The hand that was touching his back was gentle and warm.

And with that hand, his sister had killed. The ones she killed were the bandits who, from his point of view, were his companion. They were rascals who wouldn't complain even when they're dead. But, as long as that bastard orders it, even if it's the saviour who gives his blessings to all beings, even a if it's new born baby, she would without a doubt do the same thing.

"He... he made you do this much?"

"Nii-san?"

"If you stay with that guy, there's no way for you to recover... It's already the worst for you now, but surely it'll get even terrible in the future."

Other slaves have started to clean up the corpses that was slain by the swordsman. While looking at it from his side glance, he pleaded to his sister,

"If it's now... surely, if it's now we can still fix this. Make me remember, if you make me remember that I need to help you, then we still can. But if we were to stay on that thing's side, even that would surely be erased..."

"By that, are nii-san referring to the master?"

"Ah, yeah... that's why, let's run, just the two of us—"

"I conclude that to be impossible. The tracking ability of the superior unit exceeds your survival ability."

“O, of course it won’t be now. Surely we’ll see a gap someday. See, I don’t have my collar with me. There’s a way out from the obedience seal.”

While he said so, he showed his neck which had collar marks on its skin.

As she looked at it, there were no emotions in her eyes. As if she didn’t believe it.

“Warning, remarks close to an act of treachery confirmed. Requesting withdrawal of remarks. M-03 is the master’s property, nii-san.”

“That’s not your name! You are Emily, my sister, right?!”

“Indeed, however. M-03 considers that as a concurrent concept——”

“No, don’t! If you acknowledge that you belong to him, you’ll eventually think that I’m not your brother!”

“Insults against the master is not permitted. Swear your allegiance to the master. That way, together we——”

The sister repeated her mechanical refutations on her true brother’s plea.

Each time she repeated it, he was filled with despair.

Had his sister’s soul been fiddled around until the point that nothing could be done about it?

That noble was nicknamed as a slave killer. But did that refer not to the killing of his sister’s body, but of his sister’s heart?

Tears blurred his vision.

...That is why, right?

Towards the living organism that was showing hostility against its master before its eyes. The doll, which had sworn its loyalty to its master, towards the potential enemy body that had overlooked its persistent plea to change its mind.

“Never! To that man... You think I’d ever submit to that guy who never thought slaves as human!”

“...Understood.”

—- Stab.

From his chest, he could hear a casual sound that was so faint it he could've missed it.

“Eh...?”

The boy's knees fell to the ground.

His heart is hot. His body is cold.

His field of vision that was blurred by his tears became even fainter,

He held a hand on his chest, there was a hard thing stabbed there.

Is this? A knife? Who did it?..... My sister?

“E, mi... ly?”

“Oi..... what are you doing?!”

He could hear the swordsman in black, his footsteps were getting closer.

His sister faced him to give him a hint.

“M-03. Reporting to superior unit, Opus-02. Enmity from the target towards the master confirmed. Persuasion to reconsider was concluded to be impossible. Appropriate measure—-”

“That, I can tell just by looking! Tell me you didn't do that, tell me you didn't do that!”

He heard a strange conversation.

The man who seemed to take pleasure when he killed a while back, somehow seemed to be upset at the fact that the boy got stabbed.

The edges of the boy's mouth tightened. Did he find the contradiction of the man's action to be amusing and tried to laugh, or was it just spasms to show that his body was dying? He himself didn't know.

“— Appropriate measure taken, is the a problem?”

“...Problem, hell, there sure is a lot of them! Wasn't it you who said, help him out!?”

“That is correct— I thought that, if I and the target— nii-sa... nii-chan can serve master well, together— he would, finally give, my beloved nii-chan, happiness too...”

“.....”

Ah, the boy finally realised.

My sister was trying hard to help me.

She did it desperately, her face was suffering——

But, how could he mistake it as an expressionless face of a doll?

“?..... Oi, you're sweating terribly. What's wrong you——”

“A... e, M-03. Urgent report. Abnormalities detected in, heart rate, body temperature, sweating rate. Body, trembling. Autonomous behavior, problematic. Requesting relief from nearby units..... help..... master, help oniicha——”

...He couldn't hear the end of that voice.

His consciousness, he could feel that his self was fading away.

Is that so. Had I believed in my sister, could I get to live with her...?

To think that he overlooked that in his stupidity, the boy laughed.

...At the same time, he thought.

For that sake, they would've had to worship that monster as their lord.

Let their hearts fiddled with, live as a doll.

Or reject it, and then get killed by the hands of someone who has turned into a doll?

Cursing the world that only allowed such two options,

The boy was swallowed by the darkness of death.



“Have you come to regret it?”

From the seat across, the maid, who was lending her shoulder to her lord who had fallen asleep, asked. Due did not respond quickly to the question.

The carriage have since moved again.

Tullius Oubeniel have conducted initial treatments for unit M-03 who was struck by a panic attack, after he finished the treatments, he complained a few times about a series of accidents before he decided to snooze. Having gazed upon that sleeping face, Due had several doubts.

“Regret, what regret...”

“The question’s premise was ambiguous. My apologies. Have you come to regret being saved by the master?”

As she lowered her head a little bit, Uni repeated his question.

For Due, it was the top question he didn’t want to hear at this moment.

“Hee. If I were to answer ‘yes’ then what would you do? Would you eliminate me for, er, ‘potential enmity’?”

Due asked Uni back as if to jeer at her.

This Oubeniel’s maid was one who would go as far as to exterminate your immediate family if you were to show harmful intention towards her master.

If you value your own life, then shouldn’t you answer her question with a ‘no’, though.

It was uncharacteristic of him to vent out his anger like that.

Due himself realised that, but his irritation was ever so increasing...

“What a nonsensical question. We do not possess such functions. Discontent, distrust,



disgust. While these emotions can still happen, they have all been adjusted so that they may not lead to a hostile action against the master.”

Her answer made Due shudder in revulsion. So once Tullius gets to mess with your head, even if you came to mourn and hate his snakey guts, those feelings would not fade away, and they would still serve him anyway. Of course, by him, he meant this efficiency advocate, although if the impact he inflicted upon his subjects goes beyond a certain negative threshold, that might not still be the case...

“What a troublesome thing...”

“If you have no capabilities to express dissatisfaction or desire towards a certain status quo, then even if you advise or remonstrate the master, what you wish wouldn’t be granted.”

“Yeah, but that only applies for us... didn’t he say he removed emotions from the mass-produced type?”

Uni sighed. She didn’t show a particular emotion, but it felt like she was treating him like a little idiot.

“The master said that he ‘restricted’ it, not ‘removed’ it.”

(“I require uniform performance from them, there’s however a considerable restriction on their emotion due to that though.”)

Ah, indeed, the lord indeed said so.

“There is this story. Master had once created slaves that have went through complete elimination of emotions in his experiments, but it was too poor of a workmanship for the master to actually use. He left the slaves’ five senses as they were, but even when he gave them pain, they would not respond. Even when they feel pain, they wouldn’t do anything about it. So that even though the senses remain, if there’s no emotion attached to it, it would not lead to an action. Of course, you can still set instructions in advance to deal with the resulting sense, but... do you get what I mean?”

“Yeah, as much as I loath it——”

A doll that would avoid pain.

A doll that would eat when it is hungry.

In order for them to do such ordinary operation, on these puppet dolls instructions needed to be written one by one.

Rather than making such a thing,

“Rather than having to do such a troublesome thing, it’s better to use their emotions in the first place. Something like that?”

“Yes, that is correct. By leaving emotions tied to their senses, their emotions would be maintained, in turn, motivated by their emotions, actions would occur. So instead of excluding their emotions, a system method that limits their autonomy and fidelity to the extremes was adopted. However, this also inevitably impairs the flexibility of their self-action and thoughts. For that reason, as we would deal with situations that would need require more discretion from our part, for us superior units, such method cannot be utilised.”

So it’s just like how soldiers work, he added.

Due is a former adventurer. Solo was his creed, but he knew how to be a leader. If he couldn’t think on his own and follow a single pattern of predetermined thoughts, the party would have no future. Himself or Uni would therefore assume the leadership role, and the mass-produced type would be the members of the party who receive instructions. Tullius would be... the guild or the client who would send themselves in harm’s way, probably?

“Then, why just didn’t he just simply write obedience and eliminate hostility towards him like what he did to me? It seems that a surgery like that would easier, and their heads won’t get all stiff like that, right?”

You’re already stiff as you are anyway, he couldn’t say that though.

“Besides, that way they wouldn’t do something so unreasonable like trying to save someone at one time then stab them at the very next moment. That sort of deliberate method of treatment—”

“Please do not misunderstand. Our process was much more complicated. The master had to keep a large portion of our emotion intact, while ensuring our obedience and eliminate our hostilities towards him— to put it in an example, it’s like picking bad

eggs from two baskets of eggs. It would take a lot of time, but a very large omelet could be made that way. The mass-produced type, on the other hand, is like picking a fresh egg out of the baskets then throwing all the baskets' content away. The omelet would be smaller, but it'll save a lot of time."

It was a very maid-like parable.

If Due had to make a parable on his own, then it'd be like this. Like that of a bag and gold coins. The powerful units such as their own would be a big bag filled with money. In order to settle a large amount of transaction at once, the bag must be overturned first to separate the bad coins from the good coins that had mixed together in it. The mass-produced slaves are like a wallet used for smaller transactions, even when bad coins are mixed in, one can simply get the good ones at the time of payments and you can avoid issuing bad coins to the other party. You can't spend a lot, but it sure is easier.

"That sure was a revolting metaphor... even though there's still a heart in their body, that'll just be thrown away in the name of efficiency, huh..."

"That is quite the late remark. After all, we'll be our master's possession for a long, long time."

Then, Uni repeated her question,

"I will return to the earlier question, have you come to regret it? In exchange for keeping on living, you have become the master's possession."

"—— A bit late to talk about that."

He tilted his head and shifted his gaze to the scenery outside the window. There was no figure of the boy in that passing scenery. Nor of the bandits he had cut off. Before they rot and spread diseases over, and before they got reanimated and become undeads, they were all properly already treated and buried.

Even if you deduct that last one, that act of slaughter in the name of test wasn't a pleasant one. He did get drunk on euphoria in the first half of the battle due to the feeling of moving his enhanced body, and there were some sense of achievement as well. But after that he got bored with the lack of response, and he held his sword only by inertia. It's like a handicap for a bully. He didn't even know for what he wielded his sword for. To live for the sword and the sake of become stronger were his purpose of life, but now...

As Tullius had said. In exchange for life, he had to give everything. He had to swing his sword for the sake of his lord.

The contract with the devil has begun to reveal its price, a price that he begun to think he couldn't bear.

"Well now, I'm regretting this, but..."

He cut apart his regret out of the window and faced the passenger seat,

"— The thing I have now is my life, right? I believe it'll cancel out someday, as long as I can continue to live."

It was a casual answer unbecoming of the boorish Due.

It was unbecoming— in the sense that he was playing it tough.

But, it was hard to say that it was a complete lie.

If you're alive then you're being lucky, that's not an uncommon way of thinking for an adventurer. But if Due had to die, then he'd want to die a satisfying death as a swordsman. He wasn't going to get it. So he accepted the invitation of the devilish alchemist, that way he can live long enough to get that.

As long as I can continue to live, I believe it'll cancel out someday..... Really?

Even so, all that Due could do was to continue to swing his sword. As long as he lives, even if he has to deceive his conscience and cut his honour down.

"Is that so."

As she listened to the response to her answer, Uni sent a gentle look on the lord who was resting on her shoulder.

Although she was expressionless, her eyes reminded him a lot of his mother.

Was it out of adoration for Oubeniel, or was it out of the fact that she saw through Due's bluff.

"The reason why the master noticed you, I think I finally understand."

“Ah?”

“Surely, somewhere, he felt in you a part similar to himself.”

Her expression still didn’t change, but the way she breathed had some sort of special emotion in it.

Apparently, his reply was favourable for her and her subject of loyalty.

He would never meekly pleased with this, and with that pain in the neck, the swordsman who fooled Death shrugged his shoulders.

“To be likened to the lord of the ‘Silver Wolf’, that’s quite the honour.”

“You misunderstood something, ‘Two-Handed Sword’. When I say you’re similar to him, it was in a different sense of word. Even if you and the master have some degree of resemblance, you can never be him.”

With that, their conversation stopped.

The sound of the horseshoe that echoes regularly, the sound of the wheel that shakes occasionally, and the quiet breathing of the lord dominated the narrow space.

Can we get there a little bit faster? Though I don’t feel that I’m exactly looking forward to it.

“Next... experiment...”

As he heard that sleeptalk, his anxiety grew even larger.

# Chapter 8

## Oubeniel, the Invader

The time I spent traveling with a carriage took longer than I had initially thought.

Unlike modern cars, its source of power is a living thing. If its source of power gets tired, then it'd have to eat fodder. Well, since I am me, I can actually alter my horse to improve its speed, horsepower and endurance. But publicly possessing an animal with abnormal ability has the risk of me being suspected of 'unlawful possession of magical beasts'. Basically, when it comes to magical beasts, such as unicorns — I don't know how they tell them apart from normal monsters though —, one can't simply possess them without the consent of the royal family.

However, it was because of that long travel duration that I was able to carefully readjust M-03 who went haywire due to an unexpected incident, so I suppose it was a blessing in disguise. Currently, she's in the recovery phase and it'll take some moments for her until she can work like the other slaves. Later, after I open another lab in my land, I'll have to do a thorough examination on her again.

While thinking deeply about such matter, I look at the outside views from the window of the carriage. We have finally entered the Viscounty of Marlin, our destination. As far as I can see there's only weary peasants with their desolate fields. Are we really in the "Land of Fine Arts and Black Earth, Arquell"?

In addition, apparently monster subjugation has gone into a halt around this area. Uni and Due had to work not quite a few times on the way here.

I saw this coming, but to think he'd push me a land this horrible...

"Milord. That older brother of yours sure hates you..."

"Seems like it. In order to harass his little brother, he gave me these farmers who were neglected by their lord, it's unbearable, don't you think?"

Totally, Due said as he shrugs. He's the only person in my carriage for now. Usually Uni is the one who would never leave my side.

– *Knock.*

There was a sound from the roof of the carriage, but when Due unconsciously reaches for his two-handed sword...

– *Knock, knock-knock, knock.*

I heard a peculiar rhythmic knocking from above.

It was a predetermined cue.

While I raise my hand to restrain Due, I called up towards to the carriage's roof.

*TL Note: He raised his hand to signify that it's safe, if you didn't catch the drift.*

"Welcome back, Uni"

And then she opened the moving carriage's door and went inside.

I've told Uni to go on ahead to collect some information. She does have some ranger skills for her investigative quests. Something like investigating idle petty officials should be easy peasy.

"I have returned, Master. As expected, the governance in this place seems to be blatantly flawed."

She presented me a document regarding local deputy houses that divided the rule of this viscounty into three. Of course, the document that Uni brought is the copy instead of the original.

"Thank you for your hard work. Let me see... Ugh, this is just terrible. Illegal control of grain distributions and embezzlement of irrigation expenditures? Leaving bribes for water rights disputes aside... they also bribe the kingdom's auditors in order to misrepresent the audit on them. The tax rate is ninety percent. Oi, oi, doesn't that mean the folks below will always be in a state of famine?"

*TL Note: The original words used as a tax rate was “九公一民”, which means “nine for the lord, one for the people”. It's based on a system from the feudal times (or at least, in feudal Japan) when the lord of the land would take the farmers' harvest by setting up a portion to divide them as tax (they didn't know percentage back then). I put 90% there*

*to simplify things.*

“Many farmers seems to have financed their livelihoods by selling their family members as slaves.”

*TL Note: The original just said that they were selling slaves, it was strongly implied that they were selling their own family members as recounted in the previous chapter. Though it's also possible that they sold themselves too.*

“So that means, I might have had some ‘guests’ from here too? I wonder if this is what they call, ‘punitive justice’?”

“...You, how come did you find this much in less than a day?”

“That’s because I’m a maid. Mansion infiltration is our specialty.”

“That’s, not quite normal though?”

And so my opuses made merry about miscellaneous things. I didn’t participate in their conversation as I was busy thinking of things to do with this devastated territory. In any case, I’ve decided my first move.



“Am I glad to finally see you, new Viscount-sama!”

The man who seems to be the deputy that reigns the town from its government building extended his hands widely to express his welcome to me. Behind him are two men that seems to be the other deputies. They are making this obsequious, sycophantic smile at me, but there’s also this feeling of jealousy towards the first man oozing out from them. Probably they feel that the first man has stolen a march on them as he gets to host me at this time.

Perhaps to prick the men behind him, and moreover, as he reminds himself of his sense of superiority, the man was unusually in high spirits.

“It was a long journey for you, and I daresay you must be tired! Today, I have prepared a bath and other things for you! Well, please come to our humble abode! It does not compare with my lord’s mansion back in the capital, but please make yourself at home.”



His disposition was truly unctuous. Even though now that I'm posted here and consequently he can no longer freely do things he had been doing around this place up until now, I see he's still quite the sly racoon dog. Most likely, he's scheming to undermine me by playing things nicely to win my favour, in turn, that would get him appointed as my right-hand man. But against his move, I—

*TL Note: The original words used in exchange of "undermine" was "骨抜きにして", which means, figuratively, "to pull someone's backbone/teeth out". I'm not sure if there's an equal idiom in English, but looks like the closest word there is is "to undermine", credits to AW in the comments section for this.*

"Ah— right. Me, I'm not that used to traveling. And frankly I am exhausted. There's a bath ready for me, you say? That sounds good. Let us go, then."

I'll take him on. Ugh, all that shaking for days in the carriage has been rough for me. I've improved the carriages of the Oubeniel house by installing suspensions on them, but as expected, if I were to compare the carriage's seat with that of cars or trains in my previous world, then it wasn't at all a comfortable ride.

The deputy's eyes bulged in a snap as I appear to be even more dimwitted than he had initially thought.

"...Is that so, indeed? Then let me guide my lord to our bath right away! Please take my hand!"

"Eeh, is it okay? Sorry about this then, feels like I'm imposing on you."

"No, no, not at all. Since the Count expects me to serve the new lord with my whole heart in all sincerity as well!"

"Hm? My brother expects that? You see, I hate that man. He was always grumbling and complaining. Have you heard of this story before? There was this once, during a meal, he was being all noisy just because I asked which to take first between a fork and a knife."

"Yes, yes! We will serve you with all sincerity because you're our new lord, that's why!"

Never thought that flattery could be this crafty. Still, this aggressiveness. Even if he was born in my previous world, his skills as a sales can get this man go to places. When it comes to his management skills, though, he's definitely not a person I would want

in the managerial positions.

While minding those matters, I check the people around me. The deputy's officials aren't even trying to hide their scorn at me, even way before I show them that incompetent noble brat act. And with a few retainers—— that said, most of them are slaves save for one——, I followed along, as I make this soon-in-the-twenties face as bratty and as *che sera sera* as it can.

These officials have also been gazing lustfully at the maids, especially Uni. There are also some frightened face as these bunch glare at Due, who evidently has a rough appearance, probably confused whether he's an aide or a brigand. While grinning, he responds by making a provocative face.

As I've come to learn how the people on the top thinks and now that I've seen the attitude of the people below them, then apparently this is just like an enemy territory. To think that I have to manage this fief for my first time, only reputable officials and ministers can successfully turn things around here.

Well, it doesn't matter. Thanks to that, I can do things thoroughly without being easy on them.



The bath in the deputy's manor, which will be my temporary residence at this time, has quite the luxurious build. The bathtub is amply wide, wide enough for three adults to enter together while still giving them room to stretch their limbs. Most likely- no, most definitely, multiple people would enter this bath together to have various "fun". It seems that it's safe to assume that these people have been living in extravagance. Thanks to that though, I can now take it slowly for the time being.

"Is the bath temperature to your liking, Master?"

Uni's voice echoes in the stone bathroom. Of course, this was not the typical greeting in a peculiar bathhouse where she'd wait for me in her birthday suit. Uni is currently guarding the bathroom's entrance. For the timid me who would wear a completely protective dress whenever I go out, bathing time is my most defenseless moment as I remove all my clothing when I enter the bath. If I were to ask a certain legendary dual-wielding swordsman, he'd tell me not to take a bath, but I was originally a Japanese who lived in the 21st century. Even if I don't drink or smoke now, entering the bath is

the only thing I can't give up. Therefore, to guard in the vicinity so I can take my bath leisurely like this is one of Uni's daily job.

*TL Note: might be a reference to Miyamoto Musashi, but I could be wrong.*

"Ah... well, it's lukewarm, but it's not unbearable, since I'll get out before dinnertime, it's not a problem."

"If it pleases you, should I warm the bath more?"

"It's fine. Being like this once in awhile has its own charms too. More importantly, please focus more on your guard duty."

"Yes, Mast—"

Abruptly, Uni's reply was interrupted. I wonder what happened. She was trained as a maid and has been one since she was six and thus I don't think she would intentionally do something that's akin to a blunder like that. That means...

"M-03 to Chief Maid. There is a figure presently approaching the bath. Appears to be a woman, apparent age is mid-twenties to early-thirties. Very lightly dressed. No weapons nor magical powers detected from the individual. Chance of concealing such items is also minimal, over."

From Uni's maid uniform's pocket, I heard a muffled voice. It's from an apparel used for communication purposes. Think of it as a magical gimmick that works like transceiver. I see, apparently she had already sensed that someone was coming over, even before the report.

"Chief Maid to M-02. We will handle the subject in your report from here, continue to watch over the surroundings. Over."

"I don't think it's an assassin... Then, in that case, Uni—"

"Yes. Will you be using the 'perfume'?"

Apparently she already understood my intentions, even before I have the chance to finish my sentence. Her being my assistant for all these long years sure wasn't just for show.

“Right, it’s in—”

“The back pocket of master’s trousers, left side, is not it? I found it.”

“Excuse me”, Uni says as she throws the retrieved vial over. It’s an emergency, so there’s no time for her to give the vial by hand. I open the vial’s lid and put it on a suitable place. It has a densely sweet aroma, but it’s a sickly scent. My preparation is complete.

Soon after, there was a knock on the door of the dressing room leading to the bath.

“...May I know who you are?”

“My master ordered me to take care of the new lord. I have come to scrub the dirt and the likes from him.”

Send a woman like this towards the weak-willed noble son. This truly is one of the most standard strategies ever.

“The master prefers to bathe alone.”

“And leave a lady just next to him aside?”

“...Please wait for a moment. I will take your message to him.”

As if I didn’t hear their exchange, I let out a small whistle. I say Uni is quite the actress too. She left her to sweat in suspense.

“Master, you have a guest. She said she was here to take care of your bath.”

“Yes, got it, got it. Tell her that she may enter. Receiving her is the polite thing to do, isn’t it?”

“Certainly. Master has granted you his permission, please enter.”

As she opens the bathroom door, it came down to me that it appears that she had been catching her breath. Was it due to surprise because she saw Uni was carrying a sword, or was there any other elements at play? However, even if she hesitated, it was just for a moment, as now before my eyes a woman with troubled look stands.

“Good evening, new lord-*sama*.”

With my eyes that’s a bit out of it, I observe her. Her skin colour is good, and there’s no speck of dirt on her. In a backwater countryside like this, there’s only a few, if any, shops that hold women that can satisfy the nobility. So, perhaps she’s kept by the master of this house. Did he turn his own woman, or did she come sneakingly by her own volition to snuggle up against the new lord? If it’s the former then it’s just his character, but if it’s the latter, I’d say in addition to his character he apparently doesn’t keep a good eye on his surroundings.

*TL note: The original word for “dirt” is “旅塵”, which means dirt/dust that’d stick on you if you travel outside. This inferred that the woman had been inside the manor all along.*

Did she perceive my gaze? She seems to be somewhat smiling.

“Perhaps you’ve already heard me before, but I’m going to say it again anyway, I’m here to wash your back... Back in the royal capital, have you had the pleasure before?”

“Umm, not really, no. I find being preoccupied with my own hobby to be more enjoyable.”

“Oh, that’s no good. You’re a noble, so your body must experience various plays, especially that one between men and women, okay?”

She presses her body against me as she talks. Boldness sure is a good thing. Though I’m a bit anxious that she’s not in my sight, I know that Uni is just around the corner. Or perhaps I’ve stayed too long in the bath and I’m losing my attentiveness?

“Do you really mind?”

“...For now, I just want to know you a little bit closer.”

“If that’s the case then...”

A white hand takes my hand, and before it draws my hand to her chest,

“Please have this first. My homemade perfume.”

Originally, the perfume has to be diluted with water, but I just went ahead and thrust it at her tip of the nose without reservation. The bathroom is damp, so unless I do this

I wouldn't know the extent of its effect.

The smell, which I supposedly had developed a resistance to and still managed to get me a bit, swept away the light of consciousness from the woman's eyes.



The man who offered lodging to Tullius Oubeniel, one of the three deputies, was lying in his bedroom as he immersed himself in contentment. After witnessing Tullius' behavior at his welcome dinner table, it became apparent to his eyes that Tullius is helplessly average. He tried to ask him in a roundabout way for just bit of his impressions after he saw the domain for himself, but as a response he only whined about the fact that he got kicked from the royal capital to the countryside. On top of that, even though he didn't drink that much alcohol his face went all red, and the end result was he excused himself in the middle of the dinner.

In the letter from Oubeniel's new family head, Linus, it was written that he was a devil who skewed his family, but what he probably meant was that he made a hole in their finances after spending a great deal of money on alchemy. Every now and then you'd find people who'd believe the tall-tale that lead can be turned into gold and people who'd exhaust up more gold coins than what they can get in their hands.

At this rate it'd be very easy to coax Tullius to let him continue to do as he pleases.

The man laughed a shadowy laugh.

"What's on your mind?"

Asked his mistress mischievously to pull his thoughts back to reality.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm thinking about what to do next."

"You mean, what would you do about that boy?"

"Yeah... how did things go from your side?"

As he tried to draw the details from her, she laughed in a contemptuous way.

"No good. He didn't satisfy me at all, that boy. For a boy his age, he sure was too indifferent."

“And because of that, now you’re snuggling on me?”

“Yes, he was ridiculously curt. He also went as far as giving me this—”

She said as she rubbed her body. There was a scent of flower he had no memory of.

“...Perfume?”

“Probably something he got in the royal capital. Really, I don’t understand... I wonder if he felt that countryside women would be obsessed with things that’s popular in the capital...”

The man laughed as the woman complained. Certainly, the scent was a little too strong. It probably wasn’t to her liking.

That said, however, despite of him being supposedly indifferent, his gift was a passionate one. When it comes to relationship between men and women, there is a type of people who are indifferent when it comes to sexual pleasures, but are actually interested in their minds, it’s likely that the young fellow is one of those people.

If that’s the case, even if he gets the big clue that I’m trying to coax him, it’d be the same. Men will learn what stimulates them along with pleasure. I’ll save him the trouble by taking him to the bed and let him embrace women.

“Ahn, what are you trying to do?”

“Didn’t you say you didn’t get to be satisfied a while back?”

“What? Even though you just turned me to another man.”

“It’s a while to keep my rights in this place. Sorry.”

“No~pe, I don’t forgive you. Let’s have a bargain instead.”

So demanded the woman while graciously smiling. This lady sure is a greedy one. Well, what is it that you want? The man thought so as he sunk his head on her ample bosom.

“Mmn, ahn... hey, you’ll listen to my request, right?”

The scent of flower was dizzying.

...Sweet.

The scent smelt like a heavenly wine. All of his thoughts were melting.

“Yeah... I’m listening...”

Everything was fading away. The fair skin in front of his eyes, other than that, nothing else mattered.

“You’ll really listen?”

“Yeah...”

“Really, really?”

“Told you that already...”

“Anything?”

“Of course...”

He didn’t even know what he was talking about.

He seemed to hear the words along the lines of, anything, really.

The man was bewildered. Really, what was it about this woman that enticed him so? Certainly, her looks were excellent, and her skills weren’t so bad. But that was about it. In the nightlife world, you’d be able to find at least one woman of this level in every shop. Besides, if she wasn’t a woman of that level she wouldn’t be a kept woman or some deputy in a backwater territory.

But that question eventually faded and vanished too. What remained was the dubious desire that melted him.

“Quick, yes... I’ll hear it out... anything... I’ll give... anything...”

The woman laughed at his reply.

It was a laugh unfitting of her, one that was like a baby’s. And as if her eyes were covered by a film, there was no light that came out of it. The light of one’s will, there



was none.

“If that’s so...”

“Shall I have your brain tissue, then?”

A boyish voice took over and continued the woman’s words.



What to say, apparently this is easier than I initially thought.

“It seems that the perfume took into effect very quickly, but I wonder if the concentration was a bit too high... I hope it won’t leave any weird aftereffects later.”

“I don’t think that’ll be a problem. We won’t be using their talents anyway.”

Uni and I talked as we looked down on the unflattering appearance of the hugging pair. The scent of the homemade perfume hangs thickly within the room. Just like what I used on the high court investigator a while ago, it is a strange scent that makes one easier to manipulate once they smell it. Compared to the earlier version, however, this one works quicker, but correspondingly, its side effects is also stronger.

Last time, I could prepare it in my room in advance, and even if I’d end up being suspected by the kingdom’s investigation agency later, I can always use the weaker one, but, this side was the one breaking in and I suddenly had an uninvited visitor back in the bath, so I had to resort to the emergency measure.

“Excuse me. M-01, reporting to the master. Set up for temporary facilities for emergency surgery procedure in the halls have been completed. In addition, Opus-02 and the B-series have successfully taken control of the guard posts. It may be concluded that there is no problem in the advancements of Phase 1.”

“Well done. Alright then, it’ll be an all-nighter today too. We’ll take over the centre of this manor this very night. You all too, do your best, okay?”

I generously nod in approval to the maid who gave me the report.

“Yes, Master. Us slaves swear to work ever harder in zeal.”

The maid gave me a bow and left. Since this is a temporary facility, I won't be able to make elaborate adjustments like that of the mass-produced type, but since this will be a simple lobotomy operation, then there's no problem. As Uni said, after witnessing the state of the territory for myself, they do seem to be quite incompetent, so... even if I make all of them to standby for my instructions—— like standby dolls?——, I don't think there'd be any changes. Rather, I suppose the state of the fief's population as a whole will improve as they can no longer exert their tyranny on them.

“Okay, I can't keep taking my time forever. There's a lot of things I have to do, so let's just do this quickly, Uni.”

“Yes, Master.”

Answered Uni as she prepares to inject anesthetics into the deputy and his lover. She took away their resistance, and as if she were carrying a small thing, she lifted both of them together with each of her hands. Seeing Uni carrying those two as if they were light with that kind of slender body was pretty surreal.



Revamps on my vassals were completed in less than a week. The other two deputies also immediately responded after I asked them for their hospitality, and in the end they also swore their loyalty the same way as the first deputy did. Though I was prepared for a little more trouble or incident along the way, presently, no such problems happened.

At most, due to the sluggish movement of the guards, the ability to mediate the commoners' conflicts declined and security around the area, which had been low in the first place, suffered even more.

Presently for us, we are governing the territory and proceeding with the preparations of the new lab in parallel, and as busy as I am, during this time I have to properly readjust M-03 who broke around this time.

Then, at last all the general preparations have been completed today.

“...Ah, I'm tired. To do jobs other than research, isn't this my first time doing so after I was born in this world, I wonder?”

In the former manor of the deputy's basement that was refurnished as a lab, I stretched myself as I sit slovenly on my chair, as expected it'll surely be good if my facilities are in place. Even when I do the same job, there's a remarkable difference in efficiency.

"Yea, yea. I'm also overworked, but it's worthwhile so..."

So grumbled Due.

At that time he let go of an inferior material when we left the royal capital, but he redeemed himself by collecting the monsters which happened to infest the area that were attacking him to some extent. He, a battle-type "masterpiece", isn't suited for this line of work which I'm currently putting my hands on so he's doing his best in his area of aptitude instead. If he fights, he'd be able to familiarise himself with his new body which was adjusted for battle, thus it's supposed to be a pleasing thing for him.

And then Uni comes with some documents,

"I'm very sorry to bring this while you're being tired. Petitions have been sent here from all over the territory. Arbitration of water rights, resumption of disrupted irrigation works, measures against neglected dungeon, and et cetera."

"Ugh..."

Just when I thought one work was over, here it comes. When will it be until I can continue with my research, I wonder? Well, my older brother sent me here for that very purpose of keeping me away from my research. Perhaps what's going on here is just as he wished for. Except that I seized those old raccoons within a week.

"Measures against the dungeon? I thought there was a lot of stray monsters, but as it turns out, it was because the dungeon has been overflowing? Then, request to the adventurer's guild—"

"There's no reason for the former deputies to not issue a request, is there? That said, is there even a guild here?"

"There is only one adventurer's guild in this territory, since the level of requests is low and the number of cases is not that much, so our much-needed adventurers don't even come here."

That is just horrible.

“Thought so... The monsters around here might be a lot when it comes to their numbers, but their level is low. That means their drops will also be low in quality, and apparently that doesn’t look appetising at all for D-ranked adventurers and beyond. Having said that, those fledgling low-ranked adventurers—”

“They wouldn’t have the funds to come to this remote place, so they won’t come in the first place... Well, let’s save what to do with the dungeons for later. It’s not like I have no idea about it. But let’s start from treatments for agriculture-related matters.”

However, I don’t have the right kind of wisdom in me. I’m neither a politician nor a bureaucrat. I’m a researcher. Even if you ask Einstein, Gauss, or Neumann to deal with home affairs, it’s not possible for them to make effective arrangements. Even in the world of simulation games, intelligence (INT) and politics (POL) are usually different abilities.

So, I can only do things to the extent what an amateur in politics can do. Fortunately, the factions of this Viscounty of Marlin is now unified under me. There’s none of this complex thing such as faction this and faction that. And more than any other territory, the Lord of Marlin can actually do whatever he wants. Though I must be extra careful from meddling too much in a weird way and make a mess out of it.

“Let’s declare a tax cut for the time being, the current tax rate is just too terrible, as for the water rights, let’s wait for later investigations.”

“Oh, the basics.”

“How should the merchants be dealt with? It seems that they had a shady relationship with the deputies in regard of the illegal distribution of the grains.”

“Ah, yes, there’s also that, huh...? Just right, let’s take them into our fold and sell them our potions. I happen to be familiar with herbs that can grow even on a rough land like this.”

This is totally troublesome. It’d be a mistake to brainwash people like these. If their dealing partners abruptly change in behavior, there is the risk that the other merchants would come to distrust us. Well, I’ll just bait them with a more interesting deals to silence them. At the very worst, when it comes to things that can be done about them, there’s no other measures available.

“But even if we manage to transact with people that frequents the royal capital, there’s not enough manpower in the industrial sector of this territory. I’d like to propose an increase in the mass-produced type slaves.”

“Indeed. Due, you’re the least standing out when it comes to buying slaves. Please go with B-01 and B-02. Fortunately, we have enough budget thanks to these assets those guys have saved up. Go ahead and splurge on it as you wish.”

Truly, this is one classic case of “turning misfortune into fortune”. They had been hoarding wealth for some time now, and on top of it, they won’t be paid salary in the future. And more than that, they won’t raise a labour dispute. Truly a coveted talents for your typical black company. Their abilities are fine as well, though such have been severely reduced due to their readjustments.

“Yea, yea. Got it, got it. So, it’ll be fine for me to return to the royal capital?”

“No, if you do that *ani-ue* will take notice of my movements. Besides, if you cross the border from here, Canales is much closer. It’s the largest slave-trading city in the continent. Since the population parameter for sale is rather large, you should be able buy products with the normal quality at a cheaper price.”

As I give him the name of the place, Due lets out a whistle.

Commercial Capital Canales. A free city independent from the kingdom. It’s a merchant’s city where you can get ahold of anything if you have the money. The headquarters of the adventurer’s guild is also there. Due was an adventurer originally. I don’t know if he’s been there, but it’s surely a place that’d rouse his interest.

“If you’re so inclined, you may make arrangements for your equipment as well. I will leave your new armour at your discretion as well, since it’s too early for me to earnestly get into research.”

“Quite the lavish budget... my mouth is watering...”

“...Yes, and also.”

I’ll give him another advice while he’s still in high spirits.

“Is there anything else?”

“It’s not really a big deal. It’s just, if you want to buy a woman then I won’t stop you, however, if you bring her here, that means you won’t mind if I tinker with her, that’s all I wanted to say.”

It’s actually important. If my secrets leak out, then I’d be in trouble. Here I am planning to start an experiment on a larger scale than ever, and I will not let other person to roam about in this place freely.

As expected, Due seems to flinch at that.

“...Ro-ger”

Then he turned around and left.

As Uni saw that, she lets out a small sigh.

“How unsophisticated. It seems that he still isn’t quite aware that he is Master’s tool.”

“Well, not even a month has passed, you see. He’ll eventually get used to it. More importantly—”

I look at the samples that were lined up on my working desk.

Recently, fiddling with people’s head is all what I do. And while I’m used to it, I must say that if that’s the only thing I do, it does actually make quite the depressing story.

Now, after a long while, I actually want to prepare for other tasks than that.

“— Since they went with the trouble of giving me a territory. For once, let’s do something befitting of a lord for a while.”

# Chapter 9

## The Third Woman

The city of freedom and commerce, or, the capital of chaos and decadence.

Those were the words to plainly express what the Free City of Canales was.

Various things would come from various places to Canales, which occupied a strategic point of the Grand Canal in the southern parts of the continent, through its waterways.

Gold coins, jewelry, ingredients, weapons and armor, and people.

An infinite variety of people would come and visit the city. Merchants would come to trade. Sailors would come to bring goods. Nobles of other countries would come to seek rare, unusual wares. Adventurers would stop by in search for major quests. Criminals would come to seek asylum in its underworld as they were chased by their original countries. And of course, slaves, would come.

And to this place the man who sold his soul to the Devil, Due Schwarz, came with the intent to buy some slaves. Slaves who, like himself, would dedicate not only their lives but also their will to their lord.

“This guy looks quite fine too. How much is he?”

“Gee, sire! You sure buy a lot! This makes it your tenth, I suppose? Very well, let me look at it for a bit... how about this much?”

The slave merchant, with an overdone call, showed Due the amount he'd require as he observantly pointed at a boy with magic potential. He rubbed his palms and swiftly fiddled with the beads of his counting tray. He was deft to the point that even if he stopped being a merchant, he could easily fit in as a ranger in the adventurer's ranks.

“Why, quite the discount you gave me there. Right then — hey.”

While playing around with such trifling ideas, he issued an order to his (actually, borrowed) slave who was waiting in standby.

“Yes, sire. Everything has already been prepared.”

The slave in the butler’s clothes presented him a bag that was graciously filled with silver coins.

As he took out its contents and put them on the scale to confirm its weight, the merchant nodded repeatedly.

“Right, I’ve confirmed your payment... My, you really are splendid, sir! You bought this many all at the same time and you’re also sincere in your dealings. We hope to receive your continued patronage in the future, too.”

“I’ll do just that. Can we continue then? Unfortunately, I still need a bit more people.”

The slaves in the cage stopped dead at those words. There was a buyer that would buy a very large amount of slaves without even bargaining. And since the buyer had been buying so much, then it’d be most likely that the buyer was not a decent person when it comes to slaves. They probably were being afraid that they’d be sent to a no-good place, like a plantation, or a mine.

(Well... certainly their buyer is pretty scary.)

Due let out a bitter smile at the slaves’ expressions.

Tullius Shernan Oubeniel. Infamously known in the Broussonne’s slave market as “The Slave Slayer”. A weak person would commit suicide on the spot had they known that they’d be brought to his place. However, slaves that were sold in this place wouldn’t know that.

“By the way, sire. Might I interest you with the auctions?”

Unexpectedly, the slave merchant turned the conversation, attempting to draw Due’s interests.

Auction— it was an invitation he was disinclined to accept. Slaves that are sold in a way that multiple participants would compete and bid over certainly must be quality slaves. But those featured in such a way were mostly slaves for night duties only. Tullius had instructed him to buy slaves with reasonable magic potential that could serve as his alchemy assistants, and within such constraint, to gather a decent number of them. Buying a woman for her appearance only would be the true definition of



foolishness.

“Sorry. My rough tongue might give you ideas, but I’m actually here as my lord’s representative. And to participate in the bids without his permission is—”

“No, no, no! If anything, it’d be in your lord’s best interest. That lord told you to buy all these slaves at once, and it’s easy to discern that he’s a man of extraordinary wealth and rank. And for those people... you get me? In addition to the labourers, I know he’d require an aptly fine slave for his ‘other’ needs.”

It was an invitation that made Due wanted to laugh involuntarily.

An aptly fine slave? To that Tullius who collared that renowned “Silver Wolf”, even buying slaves that others would go as far as compete over now would contrarily be a downgrade to what he had. You probably wouldn’t find a product that could rival that one even if you uproot every root and overturn every leaf in the continent. Even if there were elven slaves, unless you round five or six of them up they still wouldn’t be match to her.

“It’ll be fine since we’ll only be looking around, okay? I won’t even say things to force you to have a go and bid. And besides, the auction will conclude before this marketplace closes!”

Since he put it that way, it was hard for Due to decline.

He also remembered that Tullius allowed him to buy a woman.

Though, he also said he’d tamper with the insides of her head later.

“Well, if you so insist...”

It wasn’t like that he decided to participate in the biddings. It was as the merchant said, he’d be there only to look. Due thought it was important to save his face as it was likely that he’d be doing business with merchant in the future too. If the situation dictates so, he might try bidding so long as the woman’s price was still reasonable.

“Is that so?! Then, please come this way!”

The merchant went ahead of him, his hands rubbing each other. As Due walked, he took a glance at B-01, who was following after him. And indeed as he had predicted,

his expression was as deadpan as a puppet.

“Is there a problem?”

“No. None from the master either.”

He apparently harboured no other intentions.

Then when Oubeniel said “go ahead and buy one”, it was meant to be taken in the literal sense.

That said, it had been awhile since Due had any contact with another woman. If it was just a woman he had recently seen face-to-face, then it’d be that slave-maid of whom he shared a lord with. And while she was fine-looking, all Due felt from being in contact with her was this suffocating feeling.

—- Let’s put an end to my woman drought, though I ought to avoid spending too much.

Due reflected on his frustration and self-control, and steeled himself.



“— Eeeerrrr, and for the next item we have this one over here!”

The auction had already begun when Due reached the venue. With the emphasis that she was sold while remained a virgin, a good-looking girl was up to be auctioned.

“50 gold coins!”

“60!”

“75, I say!”

“...100!”

The glaring men did not attempt to hide their vulgar desires as they were being pestered by the auctioneer to raise her value even further.

Due quickly found himself unamused.

The prices that the surrounding men blurted out, even if one were to consider it from outside the scope of budget that was given to Due, was not in any way high. However, the amount of money they were willing to spend on one woman alone was truly foolish. If he were to consider the amount of equipment he could get with that amount of gold, while it wouldn't be much, it would still be an awkward amount to let go of.

If you are willing to pay to satisfy your desires then it's much cheaper to go to a brothel, you can still have your fun there. Even if you get a slave to be your woman, think of how long it would take until she can get as skilled as a prostitute. Perhaps, the bidders must've thought something along the lines of 'hey, there's where the fun lies', but it wasn't something that Due could agree with. Occasionally then, some women would be put up with such skills as their main selling point, but if it's just for a woman to screw, he wasn't willing to spend that kind of money at all.

And then it came to him. There'd be labour and costs attached when taking care of a woman. If he'd take that, then would it make him the same as Oubeniel, he thought. Certainly, that kind of thing would make him similar to his lord. Perhaps at some point of time Silver Wolf's remarks had turned out to be pertinent.

Several slaves were put up for bids then after. There was a girl that was known to be the prettiest in a certain village somewhere, there was a daughter of merchant whose gone bankrupt last month, there was a daughter of a poor baron, there was a fallen sex slave who was once a madam reputable for her training skills... and none of them piqued Due's interest.

Seeing such Due, the merchant who invited him wryly smiled.

"I see that you're quite the finicky one, sir. Or by any chance, perhaps the lord has the more experienced eye?"

"True, that..."

He replied as the faces of the maids in Oubeniel's place floated into his thoughts. It was said that they were bought solely based on their magic potential, but at a glance none of them were unattractive. And on top of them as their head, always there on Tullius' side, was THAT one. Frankly, compared to slaves who could be bought with a little money, she must've been on an entirely different playing field.

If this was all they got, then it'd probably be better for him to leave quickly and resume

his hunt for assistant-slaves.

But as he thought of that,

“And now, for the next product! Here we have, though she has a few scars, a truly unusual item!”

“...Scars?”

He felt like he was caught by the auctioneer’s words. Normally, it was the custom to keep slaves that goes up for auctions without blemishes. It’d be in their best interest to refrain from any conduct that could lower the value of the slave, as they’d need them to be able to show their most beautiful face as far as circumstances allowed it so that customers would raise their bids in the auctions.

What are they trying to achieve by putting up a scarred woman for the auction...?

Soon however, his question was answered as the product’s appearance came into sight.

“Oh...”

“I see...”

The surrounding guests leaked a sigh of understanding.

While being pulled by a chain that was connected to her collar, the woman was brought up to the stage, still resisting and staggering about. Silvery hair, brown skin, amber eyes. Top-notch plumpness, fine curved waist, well-endowed, elevated bosoms. Temptingly, her body was one that would inflame others’ lust. But the most important point was her upright, sharp pointed ears—

“— A dark elf, huh.”

They were a race of long-lived demi-human that inhabits deserts, rocky mountains and the likes, in contrast to the white elves that prefer to live in the forests. Even though the colour of their skin would suggest that they belong to the hateful, evil kind of elves that would normally be classified as demonic beings, it was actually nothing of that sort. It was just a name given to them out of the sake of convenience for humans, as they were easier to hunt compared to the other kind of elves that would

keep themselves hidden in the forests.

“Oh, my. There are some flashy scars on her... but demi-human slaves are expensive, so the buyers are likely to overlook this much.”

It was as the merchant said, that dark elf was riddled with scars. Her defiant attitude was showing when she was pulled up, perhaps she had rampaged savagely when she was captured too.

There were faint scratches all over her limbs, and there was a roundish scar, an arrow mark, on the tip of her shoulder. The most remarkable was the one on her face. There was a trace of a slash wound, probably from a knife, that runs over from her forehead to her left cheek. In lieu of an eyepatch, a bandage covered one of her eyes. From the size of the wound, and seeing from the size of the scar that was mostly covered, under that bandage her left eye was most likely not intact.

Demi-human slaves were expensive. Elves and dark elves were particularly expensive. Originally, she should've been the main and final item up for sale in this action, but probably her scars made her to be brought up somewhat earlier than that.

“Well, first— we shall start the bidding at three hundred gold coins!”

Cheap, Due remarked as he stared at her. No, that amount was still expensive for just one slave, but she should've been as expensive as a castle. Even if she was injured to the point that she lost one of her eyes, elven slaves really were worth that much. Their high magic potency made them excellent magicians, elves would make good hunters, and dark elves would make excellent rangers due to their skills. And on top of that, they are a long-lived race, unlike the continuously depreciating humans— he thought through them all the way before he suddenly realised it. It was his adventurer's way of thinking in action.

Most of the people gathered here are either merchants or aristocrats, and a large portion of them were women. And in this place they would be willing to spend a fortune, but only if the slave was excellent looking. The dark elf certainly had the looks, but her scars were too conspicuous. Her price should've been dropped greatly at this point. She excelled in magical prowess, but that'd also mean that she'd be resistant to the obedience seal that would normally bind other slaves. Even when she had gotten injured to that degree, she still managed to show her enmity towards humans, that'd mean you'd never know if she'd stab you in your sleep one day. In order to make her

perfectly “safe”, a large sum must be paid for additional restraining apparels. She had become rather niche as a slave for a lot of buyers.

And that was why it was possible for Due to buy her even with the money he had now.

“Three hundred twenty.”

“Three hundred and thirty!”

“Three hundred fifty!”

Some customers with more eccentric tastes were beginning to raise their hands. And as expected, perhaps it should be said that most of their gazes were filled a sadistic light.

A long-lived kind. While time would age, wane and rot humans away, they would remain living while retaining their youthfulness. For those who had for themselves wealth and power, they would find these beings as most impertinent. They’d humble that slave body of hers, desecrate it, abuse it——— beat it as the subject of their twisted desires. For someone with that sort of preferences, they’d consider that some scars would instead add to her value.

‘Still, a long-lived demi-human, huh... ’

Immortality and longevity. Two of the main goals of alchemy. A non-human that tasted a drop of them from the time of their births. Of course, they can still be killed, and they still have this yoke called lifespan, but they were still closer to immortality than a human ever could.

*TL Note: “they can still be killed” is a modification of the original words, “殺されれば死に” which means “they’ll die if they are killed”.*

Perhaps she could bring a new light to the lord’s research.

“...Five hundred.”

For the first time ever since he entered the venue, Due’s hand was raised. The eyes of the merchant who was standing next to him turned round in surprise. The slave who was assigned as his attendant showed no reaction at all.

The surrounding guests began to make a stir. The tens, twenties interested parties that were standing sparsely all over the venue shifted their attention to him. 'My, who was it?' they asked as they flooded their gaze upon him——— and those eyes turned from that of curiosity to that of contempt quickly.

It should've been impossible. Even though he was dressed for business negotiations in the town, he still didn't seem like a merchant or an aristocrat. No matter how you see it, he looked like a warrior. Moreover, he was a fresh face in the auction. An adventurer who just fulfilled a well-paying quest got carried away and now got himself lost in here—— perhaps he gave off such impression.

"Humph... One thousand! In gold coins, of course!"

The man, who seemed to a merchant declared so, with scoff apparent from him.

— One thousand gold coins. Not silver or bronze coins. You can't pay that much now, can you? Don't ruin the bids, just stand there, watch and be silent.

That must've been his intention. He was trying to teach restraint to a frolicking country bumpkin who didn't know his place in such an unfamiliar place for him. Perhaps that was the way for him to satisfy his hunger for pride.

His pride was a little bit hurt.

"Why, one thousand gold coins! The bid has just been doubled! Any other offers?!"

The auctioneer was screaming about in excitement.

While listening from somewhere far away, Due let out a laugh of self-mockery. What? You think I'm angry? Being looked down by that hideous, fat merchant? Like a single human would? I may have sold my pride and soul in exchange for my life, but I can still get angry if you slight at me!

Perhaps taking Due's wry smile that was mingled with embarrassment as a declaration of defeat, the bidder showed his satisfaction on his face. As Due looked at it, his smile deepened into a ferocious one.

'Looks like you misunderstood something.'

Due had made up his mind. Originally he didn't think much of this and wasn't planning

to participate, but now that it had come to this then there was no other way. If he were to stretch his hand and continue to bid to obtain this long-lived woman, how far would it go?

— Let's do this through until the very end.

He steeled himself and raised his hand another time.

"One and a half thousand! Thanks for your heads-up. But I already know that from the start."

After sending a provocative sidelong glance at him, Due rather regretted it that he added some unnecessary words in his reply. Now the other party would get obstinate as well. He still had a plenty of room in his budget, but how much more would this take?

"We have one and a half! Any other offers?!"

"Grrr...! One thousand eight hundred!"

"Two thousand."

"...Two thousand two hundred!"

Due's spirit was lessening. He must refrain from spending too much after this.

Considering that, Due thought briefly.

The deciding point should be just around the corner.

"Three thousand."

— Murmurs...

The venue was enveloped in commotion. While it was true that she was a demi-human, why would someone bid so much for someone so scarred like that? Was it out of his whimsical interest?

Bewilderment and a tinge of fear from somewhere engulfed the venue then.



“Three thousand! Not three hundred, we are now at three thousand! Any other offers?”

“...I’m out!”

*TL Note: original is “付き合いきれん”, which means somewhere along the lines of, “no, I won’t get along with that.”*

The middle-aged man with the appearance of a merchant who was competing with him snorted loudly and apparently went away.

No matter how you hear it, it was nothing but sour grapes.

“It’s finally been decided! The dark elven slave goes to the gentleman over there!”

“Grrrrr...”

That opponent of Due gritted his teeth. A newcomer, and someone with an apparent lack of gold, had just beaten him. He could feel people’s gaze ridiculing and mocking him from here and there. That guy sure did whatever he liked. Before Due raised his hand and raised the bid to five hundred gold coins, that slave was set for him.

Due won, but he didn’t feel like he won anything at all. In the first place, he was using other person’s wallet in the match. If anything, he felt a petty, miserable feeling from inside of him somewhere. These days— ever since he accepted Tullius’ hand, this kind of thing had been continuing for some time now. ‘Would a fine day come to me someday? As long as I continue living, probably?’

While he thought so, he took a glance at the slave he just bought. Being one of the long-lived, it’d be likely for her to live longer than him if nothing happens to her—— though, of course, that was not going to happen.

The dark elf returned his glance with a cold look, as if she was saying, ‘like I care’.



“What are you planning to do now, Due-sama? The budget from the master has almost run out.”

There was no sign that B-01 was trying to blame him in his voice. It was just a simple

question of what to do after this.

By the way, Due was not to be referred as “Opus-02” here. As they were now in the outside world and not Tullius’ dominion, it was deemed that that strange way of referring people should be avoided from strangers’ ears.

*TL Note: Original word for “dominion” is 腹の中, “inside of stomach”.*

“Well, one thing for certain is our shopping trip ends here... Uh—”

Of course, Due had to call him by his human name too.

“Jack, sir. And while it is fine to end it here, I’m afraid we do not have enough funds for the return carriage fare.”

“...Even in a rented carriage?”

“Even in a rented carriage. Here we have eleven new slaves. Even if you rent one, it would be expensive to carry this number of people.”

‘Oh, crap’, he said as he scratched his head. Although he had unexpectedly valuable samples with him, the number of assistant-slaves he had procured was one-third of what he originally planned. In addition, they were hit by the lack of funds for their return trip.

The carriage which they originally used was too small. Even if they were to decide to make separate trips back to Marlin, the amount of round-trips that needed to be taken would be too much. It was urgent for them to replenish the mass-produced slaves. They just didn’t have that sort of time.

“Fortunately. We’re in Canales. The guild’s headquarter is here, and my license is still valid. If I take a B-ranked quest, that return carriage far shouldn’t be an issue.”

“...You people are appalling.”

The dark elf woman who had kept her silence until then opened her mouth, her face wholeheartedly making fool of them.

Her voice was low, but it was a voice titillating to the ear. Her voice was devoid of any feelings, but it had an intoxicating charm that would make any man who heard her

drunk without fail. It was almost like a strong wine. You know it'd cloud your mind and get you hooked, but you just couldn't help but to reach for it. If her body was in the perfect state, her price would've jumped twenty times.

"Finally you're in the mood talk, huh?"

He hid his fascination in his laidback tone.

Other slaves were kept caged in the market until he had the means to transport them, but this one, whom he spent a fortune on, was different. It was the safest choice to keep her by Due's side in order to avoid mischief-makers from making a mess out of her.

"On top of being bought by dirty money, now I find myself lost on the roadside. I don't have the energy to put a word in, you see."

"Anyhow, I'm thankful that you're now starting to voice your thoughts. By the way, I haven't heard your name yet."

Normally, one wouldn't know the name of a slave, even their seller wouldn't. Of course, if their name could act as an added value, such as in the case of a daughter of a prominent family, then it'd be a different story entirely.

The woman's reply, however, was brusque.

"A despicable shaved ape like you is not worthy to be entrusted with my prided name. If you wish to hear it that much, why don't you use the thing you learned from the bastard that collared me?"

Of course, I'll be resisting you with every fibre of my being though. She thoughtfully added that to her remarks.

Due shrugged his shoulders. He had zero knowledge of magic. And while he knew how to use the obedience spell, he also knew that that the quantity and quality of his magic would be pertinent when casting such spell. Long-lived kind would naturally resist the spell as their command of magic was far superior. If he were to repeat the command again and again then his spell might bypass her resistance, but it might require him to squeeze all his mana to the point that it'd be painful for him just to open the indices for once. Doing all this just because he was interested to know her name was just stupid.

“...Well, fine. There’s plenty of time for us to know each other later anyway. There’s a more pressing problem now, an inn for today. With the money we have left, we probably won’t get much of a bed...”

“Aren’t you a bit too carefree about this?”

‘Can’t be helped’— but before he could make the words, a voice filled with malice overwhelmed him.

And as he looked, there from the dark shade of a building was his opponent from the auctions a while back. And some of his henchmen were swarming around him.

“I was wondering what kind of person who took what supposed to become mine was, but to think that he doesn’t even have a place to sleep for the night... With that kind of financial condition, are you trying to disgrace my possession from the sideways?”

His mouth was distorted in a way to expose his hatred as he said so, his tattered clothes was reflected on his eyes, in which fervour filled his stare.

It was apparent that he wished to retrieve what he wanted from a while back.

A sigh escaped Due’s mouth at the encounter of this unexpected problem.

“You sure are picking a fight, huh... She’s mine now, just so you know.”

‘Though she’ll be that alchemist’s guinea pig soon enough.’

“And not only that! Thanks to the fact that I gave her up to you, the people around me made light of my financial prowess! I had to bid the final item at a higher price than I expected! Do you understand how much I had to bid? Haa?”

“So in short, you’re just venting your anger...?”

“You just got your just deserts.”

The dark elf was spectating how things progressed as if she was having fun. It was clear that she didn’t regard the man who merely bought her as her master. Was it because she had plenty of guts, or was it merely because she was desperate? Anyhow, hearing her sure was more pleasant than hearing this turtle-stomached, pig-like fatso.

“Some men are now squabbling over you... even if it’s just a bit, do you feel like a princess now?”

“Some male in heat are now gnashing at each other. Feels like watching a dogfight.”

“You have plenty of guts, I’ll give you that.”

What an interesting woman, he thought. Humans had made numerous cuts on that body and enslaved her, but her boldness remained. Had he met a woman like her back in his adventuring days, he probably wouldn’t act like a lone wolf, so he felt. And while it was regrettable for him to hand this gem over to Oubeniel— Due was unfortunately not so different from the slaves in the way that his head had been tampered with as well. When the time comes for him to hand her over, there’d be no way for him to stop it.

“Quite composed aren’t you, you lowly cave-diving adventurer. Is it because you have confidence in that arm, or is that mouth?... Humph. I thought you were that sort of person from what I see, so I have come up with this idea.”

At the merchant-looking man’s cue, one of the henchmen unsteadily stepped forward.

‘Is he his bodyguard?’, he seemed strange. He was staggering about as if he were drunk.

To the puzzled Due, the man floated a smile as he carried on,

“A death was inflicted during a conflict between adventurers... Even if it’ll seem like a murder or whatever, there won’t be an indictment... is that right?”

It’s the principle of the Adventurer’s Guild. ‘Your safety is your own responsibility’, which seemed to be just that, but it was actually a shitty rule that legitimised some people to crush the newcomers, or at least Due thought so. If the number of people can be reduced by eating each other, then the remaining will get more for themselves. It was a regulation to protect such mercenarism.

As he almost died once due to the abuse of that rule, it was a clause he didn’t want to recall.

“...Though if you’re being too conspicuous, the headquarters would bring along their thugs to reproach you later. What’s your point?”

“I told you, that is why this plan is designed for adventurers like you... go ahead and give your name.”

As he said so, the reeling man opened his mouth.

“I, I, I see, ‘Two, Two-Handed Sword Due’...”

Due knitted his eyebrows as he heard the man called his second name articulately.

“You... are you an ex-adventurer?”

“Even, I’m like, this... I... I’m still o, one... ‘Flying Swallow Sword Molto’. B, Rank... Witness, my moves...”

There was no indication that a razor ever touched his unshaved, stretched beard. He was so skinny that his eye bag sunk on his overhanging cheekbones. He looked like a typical vagrant, but there was an eerie glint on his eyes when he gave his name.

Hanging on his waist was the exotic sword named katana. A sword from a country in the far east, which lied across the dangerous oceans. The sword, which was brought by the explorers several decades ago, boasted magnificent sharpness and was known for its delicateness which required exquisite skills. In other words, it chooses its wielder. On top of having survived such requirements, it seemed that he was an extraordinary wielder of that sword.

“What a mess... you drunk?”

‘Alcohol probably sent him off the rails’, Due guessed. Surprisingly, it was the dark elf who denied it.

“No. It’s a drug. On his nose I can see a definite rash only found on those who inhaled it.”

“Aren’t you quite specific... you a fellow user?”

“Don’t say foolish things. The shamans in my hometown used to use them for long session of prayers. It would abnormally invigorate and sharpen the nerves of its users, making them able to go on for two or three days without sleep... though I suppose it’s quite the strong stuff for humans.”

“Kuhuhu, it’s the filtered powder of *kannagi-ginou*’s essence. The darkness in this city is deep. I’m surprised that he was a famous adventurer once, but he’s dependent on me and now he’s like this.”

He proudly said so as he let go a packet of medicine he took from his pocket to the ground.

The swordsman, who named himself as Molto, picked it up as her bloodshot eyes were reddening even further.

“O, Oooh!? D, drug! Mine, miiineeee!”

“Kahaha! You want this thing, huh? You want this? If you slash that guy, I can give you more of it, you know? Freshly refined one, with even better purity!”

“S— Slash! I will slash!... Sniff... Sniff, sniff...!”

Molto crouched and took his medicine like a dog. With each inhalation, he convulsed in ecstasy.

After he saw his sorry state, Due turned his indifferent gaze to the merchant.

“...Isn’t that supposed to be illegal?”

“Here, gold is the law.”

If you have that kind of money then you don’t have to bring up a settled issue, then. Due wanted to say that, but before he had the chance to, Molto stood up.

His atmosphere had been changed completely.

“Fu.....”

He took a long breath. Pressure in the air thickened, bloodlust was filling in.

The tremor on his limbs went away.

His figure completely transformed as he stood there serenely, as if his own self were a single sword.

He wiped off the droll from his euphoria with a sleeve, and as his dignity was restored, he opened his mouth,

“I’ve shown you something unsightly.”

“.....”

“Let me compensate my rudeness with the spirit of my sword.”

As he spoke, he dropped his waist slightly and pushed the guard of his Katana up with his left hand’s thumb. The clank of the sword guard as it parted with the sheath resounded clearly in the stagnant darkness of the city.

His right hand was clenching its handle. But he had yet to unsheathe its blade.

‘His posture is far from ready and his sword is still sheathed, but what is this cold feeling? Feels like its white blade had already struck me’. As if at that next moment, his sense of crisis had already been doubled.

Now, he heard the dark elf ask him back,

“What is that?”

It was something familiar to him.

“The art of sword-drawing... from what I’ve been told, once that blade leaves its sheath, at that same time its opponent would be cut down.”

*TL Note: original word is battoujutsu, a special kind of sword art. If you’ve seen Kenshin in Rurouni Kenshin then you must’ve seen it for yourself.*

It was the first time for Due to have a practitioner of that art as his opponent.

“Originally, it seems to be merely a technique to counter against unexpected attacks, but a school where one would accumulate their advantage then unsheathe their blade with godly speed to strike also apparently exists too.”

*TL Note: the name of the school’s technique, which I omitted, is **noutou/noto**. There’s plenty of youtube videos that shows what kind of move it is if you’re interested.*



“You seem to have learned a lot about swordsmanship—”

Molto floated a cracked smile,

“—— but even if you know about it, you still won’t be able to dodge this!”

What was there were a swordsman’s pride and self-confidence.

Even if his body and his mind was contradictorily being ruined by the white powder, his blade alone would not rust nor cloud.

“That’s right! Now his senses are being enhanced by the high he got from the drug! His extent of ability, not to mention when he was off the drug before I meddled with him, is now far better! A while back, there was this rude person who claimed he was A-ranked, but he cut him like a fish with just a single stroke!”

“...Are you done with your big talk?”

As Due said so, he pulled out his two-handed sword.

If what he said was true, the man who was standing before him had the skills to slaughter even a Rank-A. He was different from the pathetic thieves, the wild monsters, and the unskilled traitors who attacked him in surprise. Although he had been threading the wrong path, he would truly make a formidable enemy.

As his bloodlust made his skin throb, he remembered that sensation.

His title was on par with him.

The drug had had doubled his ability, or perhaps it did more than that.

With what little pride he had left and his instinct, his remaining inner flame tingled still.

“Well then, let’s begin without further ado. They say time is money, right, Sir Merchant?”

“It goes without saying! As you wish then, ki—”

Before he finished his words, Molto had moved.

His lean figure was hazy. As Due's eyes were trying to capture it, he could feel time being stretched in his vision.

He stepped forward. His speed was ungodly. As if there were two of him, his momentum was like that of a flying sparrow's. When he noticed he had already exceeded one step and one cut away from him.

The blade parted from its sheath. The blade's glint apparent from it. It swung upwards. It approached his right flank. And then it was slashed to reach as far as his left shoulder.

He dodged. Took a half step to the left. He dashed through the blade's edge at a paper's distance. His posture was still in a swing. A side of his body was exposed. It was a good opportunity. He took the post-initiative. He aimed and raised the tip of his sword.

...Got him!

However, he saw Molto smiled. His look was elated. 'Why is he happy?', he wondered.

As if to answer him, the enemy's left hand jumped upwards.

'What he's holding is... a sheath? Is he wielding the sheath? But there's no blade'. However, he drew it and twisted it like a sword, adding its speed.

It had an ironwork's weight. The sheath was a blunt weapon. It was enough to kill.

'...Am I going to be killed?'

——— His thoughts accelerated. His reaction speed increased.

The stretched time slowed even further.

Triggered by his sense of crisis and survival instinct, Due's switch had been flipped. He changed from the swordsman named Due Schwarz to a weapon of slaughter that the alchemist had engineered. Rather than feeling awakened, he felt like he was falling into a nightmare.

He caught the weapon with his eye, then gripped the swinging sheath. His opponent's thin arm was like a dead tree. It was the drug's harmful effect. What a sorry sight.

But he wasn't in the position to comment on other people. His own body was now a human weapon, tampered with by that alchemist.

'Both of us obtained power from a demon, so in that way we're the same, huh.'

'Molto has worn away his pride along with his life. Then what about me? I exchanged my pride for my life and power. What about the other price?'

Due thought about such. He could still afford to think. Having paid the price, albeit temporarily he was now as skilled as an A-rank adventurer. "Could I afford to do this before?" he wondered.

Nevertheless.

Had he got lost in his thoughts, he'd be slammed by the sheath from the left or he'd receive the returning blade's second slash from the right.

That's why he ended his thoughts at that point. All he had to do was to continue living and work forward through what he had gotten himself into, follow the orders thrown by that demon, and swing his two-handed sword through. And now he had to strike both the approaching iron stealth and the enemy before his eyes.

The iron chunks crossed with each other. The resulting sound was closer to a scrape rather than a crash.

And then, the wind blew through the mass beside his body.

...A long moment had passed.

The thin, slender body looked once again as if it were a dead tree.

"—ll him!...?"

"...Spln, did."

Drug-stained fresh blood flew to the untroubled merchant's face as he finally finished his speech.

Molto's body, which had been cut off slantwise from his left shoulder to his right flank, split into two and then flew off elsewhere.

There was a sound of an impact.

The remnants of the katana wielder which flew off hit a magic-powered street light. The post pierced him, his body sunk as together they turned into a tasteless objet d'art.

"This outer road... was not the right path... huh..."

As the lamp's magical light flickered and disappeared, Molto's eyes too, were closed.

At the same time, the part from the chest down which still stood crumbled as if its strings were cut.

The dumbfounded merchant's gang finally began to show their dismay.

"Eh...? Ah...?"

"Mo, Molto...?"

Due passed through the merchant and his surrounding henchmen, and crouched beside Molto, who had breathed his last in the darkness. His dead face was tranquil. He remained a swordsman until the very end, and he was an opponent he recognised until he met his death, and as he embraced his flood of emotions, he passed away just like that.

"...You were such a fool."

A trembling whisper leaked out. He embraced the wrong kind of satisfaction and selfishly kicked the bucket. That was the true nature of the katana wielder's death.

'Right path', he said? If this was about going off one's path, then compared to him Due was way out. His muscles had been rebuilt, his skeleton reinforced, his neural network reconstructed, even his brain tissue had been tampered with. Molto, who did one drug only, was much closer to this 'right path'.

The high he got from the forbidden medicine at the end of the day was like a far-off pandemonium inside his clear mirror. After all, until the end, the swordsman's eyes remain clouded as he passed.

*TL Note: The "clear mirror" here is actually a kendo concept, named meikyo.*

“HIIIIIIIIHHH...!?”

Thud, the merchant fell butt-first. Probably he didn't think that he was about to be killed with a single slash from the opponent whose prized possession he had casually—- though, with enough intent to kill—- incited.

In his distress, something warm soiled the front of his trousers.

“Ru, run!”

“But, the boss—“

“You imbecile! Being alive is more important!”

The henchmen who surrounded the man escaped, and the fat middle-aged merchant was left alone.

...It felt stupid. This time, it was almost like then when he slaughtered the bandits. The other party started a fight without thinking, he killed some, and then he'd feel his hand being lazy as he grew tired of his gained power.

How many times must this repeat?

“H, help...”

With a tone begging for mercy, the pig cried.

“Mo... money, I'll give you as much as you want...”

“Don't need it.”

He was just paying back the sparks that was sent down to him. Although he didn't hesitate when he had to kill the escaping bandits, here he wasn't ready to cross the line yet.

“Please don't kill meee!”

“Ain't gonna kill you either.”

“This two-handed sword is not a tool for pointless murder’.

‘..... Then, what is it for?’

To the anguish in that question, a click of tongue leaked.

“...Run along then. Jog on before I change my mind and do away with you.”

“HII, HIIIIIIIIH!”

While his wet trousers would still make it hard for him to walk, the merchant aimlessly ran away. It was a disgraceful sight. Both for himself and Due.

“You, what kind of face you’re making there?

The dark elf asked. Bleeding from her voice were bewilderment and pity. Was it because she didn’t know what was in the mind of her temporary master who bought him, or was it because she understood that something was bothering him?

But that particularly was a trifling conjecture.

The woman carried on,

“You have that kind of sword skill, and though I loathe it, you are wealthy enough to redeem me.”

“.....”

“So why is your face so empty?”

Because, everything of it were just borrowed——

Instead of pouring out his true thoughts, he decided to confess another thing.

He silently embraced her.

And for some reason, the woman, who could even resist the magic of her collar, hesitantly accepted it.



“And so, on top of you being forced to return much later than planned, you have spent a large portion of the budget on the dark elf.”

I paused my hand, which was approving some documents, and gazed Due’s way.

As for him, he’s scratching his head.

“I really feel bad though, Milord.”

And he said that.

He seems to be reflecting. Though whether he can be forgiven or not, that is a different matter entirely. No, I’m not the one who isn’t forgiving him.

“Sheesh, just what are you doing? You.”

Uni is so angry to the point that her anger could strain the air. Her expression doesn’t change as usual. But even I, as her master, can feel a cold feeling in my spine. She’s not showing it, but as a reaction to what Due bought, it seems that she’s strongly feeling that this matter cannot be forgiven as it is.

“Uni.”

“...My apologies, Master.”

She apologised for leaking that malicious bloodlust and took a step backwards. Most likely, she’s still angry. Let’s prescribe something for it later.

“Well, this time I’m partly at fault too. I did carelessly leave too much things at your discretion. And the budget had also been excessive.”

Had I done otherwise, there was no way for him to buy a dark elf, scar or no scar. I handed over a giant amount of the hidden money enclosed by the frontier’s deputies with sloppy bookkeeping. That was the indirect cause of this issue. It’s true that it was Due who mainly did it, but if you were to blame someone for their carelessness, then I wouldn’t be able to escape the censure.

“Besides, we’ve unexpectedly gotten ourselves a precious dark elf. So let’s just be

careful regarding this matter from now on.”

“...Is it really fine?”

“You see, I did issue a fuzzy order like ‘go ahead and splurge on slaves’, right. I didn’t let him know how much I needed until their number meets my requirement. I also allowed him to buy a woman. Though I never thought he’d buy a woman this flashy and expensive.”

And that means, the root of the cause is the mistake in my order set-up.

“If that is the case, when Master was making that mistake, I was also at fault as I did not rectify you. I see, it seems that I am in no position to blame him.”

That apparently was Uni’s way to forgive him while maintaining her integrity. I know it’s the result of my education, but she sure is serious to a fault.

“Alright. Then, let’s wrap this matter up here.”

“...I’m really sorry, okay.”

Due laudably lowers his head. Somehow he seems more down in the dumps than ever. As I think about that, I gazed at the dark elf that he bought.

Could it be that he was moved by his emotion? Well, he bought this slave with such a large sum, he must’ve thought of it to some degree. Even so, to pour the whole budget for a wounded slave, I don’t think anyone else would’ve done that.

For some reason the dark elf is staring at Uni, of whom is standing by behind my chair.

“...Woman. Are you really human?”

And then she made something rude to say. Well, in terms of treatment, she’s my “masterpiece” of a tool, though.

“Biologically, I am judged to be so. The Gallerien Magic Academy certified it.”

“So, she’s human, but she’s not really one. Even though she’s supressing her magic, this amount is just... Just in what way and how far did you tamper with her?”



The dark elf's eyes are filled with suspicion and dread.

Uni accepted that stare without shaking one bit.

Though she said that, compared to Due I have yet to tamper with Uni that much.

"It's because she, as a raw material, was good. With continuous medication and effective training, the result is, well, she made it this far."

"Everything is due to Master's guidance."

"...Do your puppet play somewhere else. You're making me sick."

Even if she told us to do that elsewhere, I find it a bit troubling. Even though here is just a temporary residence until my new home is made, this is still my manor.

In that insecure atmosphere, Due interjected without waiting.

"Quiet."

"Why are you stopping me? No, why are you obeying a man like this in the first place? With that ability of yours, there's no reason for you to be a piece of this lowlife of a noble—"

"Be quiet, I told you!"

It was as if he was screaming.

'With that ability of yours', huh. Thinking about the root of that power, those words might be hard on Due.

"Well, well, let's not quarrel here. Surely, everyone will be able to get along, yes?"

"Who would get along with someone like—!"

"Can you do it?"

The dark elf saw Due as if she couldn't believe what he had muttered.

They've been together only for a few days, but it seems that they've developed quite

the close relationship.

Rest assured. I'll make sure to keep it so you'll always be together.

"It'll be the first time for me to deal with a living dark elf. Though, I've seen some samples of long-lived species."

When Uni was an adventurer, she sometimes would took down elves who were in the other party. I had the chance to touch a cleaner form of them under the academy. Professor Graumann had given me a variety of valuable experiences when I was under him.

"I'm familiar with elves, well, their body structure is not so different than one of a human's. In all likelihood, I can do something even with a dark elf."

"Are you going to do only that?"

"Ahahahahahahaha! Do you think I'm just going to dissect her? Unfortunately, a long-lived demi-human can't help me approach my goal of immortality. First of all, the mechanism of their longevity is—— Oh well, let's just end it there. The important thing is, what I am going to do with this rare body."

"STOP! YOU BASTARDS, WHAT ARE YOU—"

"Hold her down, Due."

"...Yeah, got it."

Due followed my order and gently restrained her.

On her face, with her only remaining eyes wide open, I can see the embodiment of the very word of despair.

"...Hey, you're joking, right?"

"Too bad, we're for real... By the way, you, I forgot to ask you an important question."

In a trembling voice, I ask the woman whose hands were still restrained,

"You, what is your name?"

"I, I'll never tell you my name!"

"Ah, that so."

Her answer was that of a refusal.

I did expect her to say that, but well, can't be helped. I'm not that interested anyway.

"Well, no matter. I'll just think an appropriate new name for you."



"— Name."

A night in Canales. As she wrapped her sweat-laden body with a sheet, she said so.

"Ah? What was that."

"It's my name. Have you been listening?"

Nope, the man answered.

On a narrow bed of a cheap hotel, while holding a pillow, they were cuddling up. He couldn't have missed the words that were whispered to his ears.

"What has gotten into you? Just before, you said you would never mention your name to an ape."

"What? It was just simply a whim."

As she said so, the woman smiled lightly.

It looked like a mirage in the desert, it was a faint smile that would disappear should one decided to approach.

"It's just a sudden thought. I feel like no one will call me with my name ever again."

"....."

"Thinking that not one person would remember it, feels a little lonely. So at the very

least, I want someone to know.”

The man drew his breath at her words.

The innumerable wounds engraved on the woman’s body were a testament of the severity of affliction that had befallen into her.

A battle that wounded a rare existence like her that far—— considering so, perhaps her clan no longer existed.

The woman, as if to protect herself from an unfamiliar pain, turned her body sideways.

“As expected, it was just a delusion... I won’t say it a second time.”

“I won’t hear it a second time.”

The man, as he leans on his arm pillow, gazed upwards.

“Because if you say it the second time, I won’t be able to forget it.”

It was an oath that was heard only by the moon outside their window.

——- True to those words, the woman’s name would remain only in the man’s chest.

# Chapter 10

## The Alchemist's Theory of State Enrichment

The dark elven woman has had a body material that can only be rarely seen in these recent years.

Her high magical power was remarkable, her tough and tempered body was outstanding, and her racial skills were splendid, as expected, compared to these the three thousand gold coins spent on her was nothing at all.

The loss of one of her eyes would usually count as a flaw, but fortunately, a material I've brought from the family mansion in the capital was enough to make up for it.

Thanks to this, it seems that my frustration that was building up due to the unsatisfying amount of research activity in this place could be resolved to a large extent.

"How are you feeling, Opus-03?"

"Yes! I feel most invigorated. At the same time, I feel the past me who resisted Master was truly preposterous!"

While dignifiedly tightening her unblemished face, the woman said so.

Her left eye is covered with an eye patch adorned with a magic pattern.

After all, exposing her new left eye to the public eye wouldn't be a good thing.

"If you work earnestly for me from now on, then I don't mind it."

"It would be my humble pleasure!"

Her brain remodeling seems to have gone well.

I tried to suppress her enmity by brainwashing, but it was too strong. So I had to resort to irregular treatment, but seeing this result, apparently it was the right course of

action.

Apparently this method can be used for my next “masterpiece” too.

“She’s changed quite a lot... so what did you do?”

At her, who replied me briskly and showed me her loyalty unhesitatingly, Due’s feelings seems to be mixed.

From the perspective of Due, who fancied her from a while ago, this sight must’ve been not really amusing.

For now, let me answer his question.

“This child, her enmity towards me before her remodeling was too strong, you see. I couldn’t eliminate her hostility the way I did yours, or restrict it the way I usually do those mass-produced type for the risk that her rapid personality change may lead her mental condition to self-destruction. That’s why I tried to change my approach.”

“Even if it was changed, in any case it seems that it is a satisfactory approach. Then?”

“And then, I thought something along these lines. The main root that caused her hostility. ‘If that could be rewired, wouldn’t the matter be settled agreeably?’ I thought. The factors that inhibited her obedience towards me were her sense of belonging and pride of being one of a Dark Elf, “her own tribe”. And because those senses see me with contempt, she would continue to resist, be angry at, and hate me.”

As my explanation reached that point, it seemed that Due has grasped the gist of it too. He seems to be even bitterer than before.

“Ah, is that so? So that means, that cognition—“

“Correct, her reason was changed to the fact that she was my ‘masterpiece’. Because there was minimal interference to the concerned limbic system and her reason in her cognition area as a root was altered, the risk of mental collapse was greatly reduced. Her personality has changed for a tiny bit as a side effect, but her capacities of autonomous action and decision-making could be kept intact.”

As I had to mess with delicate areas the process takes time and it may not be suitable to apply to a large number of subjects, but when it comes to masterpieces that would

require these details, applying this method would be the best.

Uni was all—

“It’s wonderful, Master. If you have the opportunity to readjust me in the future, by all means please introduce that method on me too.”

— praises like that. Well, as she went as far as volunteering herself for it, that stuff is quite pointless for her though.

“Alright. Opus-03, your individual name is Drei. From this time onward, you shall identify yourself with that name.”

“Yes! I will devote myself so as not to sully the new name Master has kindly granted me!”

No objection to the new name, then.

As I take a backward glance at her, who is now proudly puffed up, I record that name in the medical records.



Although I’ve been engrossed with making a “masterpiece” out of that rare body that I’ve unexpectedly obtained, it goes without saying that I still don’t forget my job as a lord. If I don’t govern this area steadily, the funds for my research will discontinue as well, and I don’t know what that brother of mine would accuse me of later. Besides, this is the land where I’m planning to build a laboratory on a scale larger than ever in the future. I have no plans of letting any oversight in my care.

“...We have finished adjusting the mass-produced slaves M-03 to B-07. They are now waiting for Master’s orders.”

“Then, shall we begin?”

Accompanied by Uni and the slaves under her command, I set out from the mansion.

Our destination is one the farmlands that has been devastated and thinned.

I’ve been delaying to take measures to tackle the farmland issue ever since I’ve arrived

with this and that excuse, but it seems that the common folk are at their wits' end. And when a revolt breaks out somewhere, it tends to spread to the rest of the country. If that happens, my brother would surely echo my misdeed with joy, and attempt to murder me socially... Doesn't it cross his mind that if things go poorly there is a risk that the problem would spill over to his lands and territory? And that circumstance is pretty much the weak point of my brother's gambit.

"It's the lord... the lord has come!"

"Oh, is he finally somehow going to do something about this land!?"

"...Hmph, why is he nonchalantly here all of a sudden?"

When I arrived at the farmland, folks in ragged clothing were crowding around me. On their faces, half appears to be hopeful, and half appears to be anxious, no, is it about three to seven? Even if these people rely and lean on the nobility, they've had been continuously treated curtly up until now. Now that I've shown my face, they won't easily trust me right away. Indeed, some people are steeped with hostility as they see their noble oppressor, and even those who don't are gazing me with suspicion as I'm accompanied by slaves only.

*TL Note: 3/10 of the crowd were hopeful and 7/10 were anxious. It pretty much tried to express that.*

"Why, hello, hello there. On this occasion, please accept my sincerest apologies for delaying to take action for this farmland since I took office as the lord."

For the time being, I lower my head lightly. 'Oooh', so the people surrounding me were stirred. Probably the idea that a noble would apologise to the common folk is beyond the pale of their imagination. In fact, no matter how debt-ridden a noble be, very few would humble themselves in front of a commoner.

"Regardless, please be assured. Until this very day we've had continuous discussion to devise a course of action that would satisfy all of you. Now, there's nothing to be afraid of anymore. Let us restore this desolate field to its splendor once again."

"Ooooh!"

"What confidence!"



“Heh, how can I be confident —- ouch!”

“You! Even though the noble one went as far as lowering his head, what are you saying!?”

Alright, I get off to a satisfactory start. Although I couldn’t wipe out the distrust in some people, I can confirm the sight that they were being admonished by their surrounding for it. ‘The nobleman went as far as lowering his head, as he voluntarily did it, what’s with your reaction?’, that sort of psychology would naturally work. Something like “just lowering your head won’t solve anything” only works when there is no gap between the statuses of both parties. In the medieval themed world, a noble’s head would be deemed highly. As long I don’t mistake the timing as to when I should sell the idea, I can profit from it.

“Well then, let us get started... Uni.”

“Yes, Master.”

On Uni’s cue, all the mass produced slaves began to move at once.

While carrying a jute bag that was uniformly prepared from the mansion on their shoulders, they went into the field. And after they were lined up at equal distances, they scatter its contents all at once.

The move would certainly alarm the farmers. Even though they belong to the lord, the slaves that make up the lowest social strata have marched into their fields, their greatest asset, and scattered something unknown. If I were to look this calmly, it’s almost as if I’m giving them some sort of a warning.

“Yo-you people, what are you—!?”

“My, please calm down. You’ll understand when you look at it.”

Those who were trying to rush in were stopped in their tracks by my voice. It was a direct order from their lord. No matter how bad it is for the people, they had no choice but to wait.

As the villagers watch with their eyes tightened, the scattering job finally ended.

I waited as the all the slaves restore their uniform distance, then I issue an order,

“Ri—ght, very well then, do it as I’ve arranged before... ‘*Transmutate*’”

“M-01, affirmative. ‘*Transmutate*’”

“‘*Transmutate*’”

“‘*Transmutate*’”

Dozens of the mass produced slaves invoked the “transmutation” incantation in unison. A magic circle enveloped the wide field, and the thing they scattered— seashells, fish bones, vegetable scraps, all sorts of fertiliser material— rapidly returned to the soil. By the time the light emitted by the magic circle fades, the soil in the field has been turned into exquisitely, rich-looking, black and brown in colour.

“Is, is this!?”

“A, am I dreaming!? The state of this soil, I haven’t seen something like this for the last twenty years!”

One of the aged farmers gingerly descends to the field and put a mouthful of soil into his mouth. It has been said that some of the skilled farmers would sometimes measure the quality of their field by putting its soil into their mouth. Though in my previous world, as it was in the modern times pesticides and chemical fertilizers may also be mixed into the soil, so they kind of stopped.

“It’s good... good, good lively soil... it’s the same soil during the last great harvest of this land, long, long ago...!”

“Really, gramps!?”

“Yo, you’re lying, right?”

The villagers who surround the crying elderly found themselves in delight and, more than that, bewilderment as they gaze at each other’s face.

Now, what I did wasn’t at all complex. As you might’ve imagined, “soil of a desolated field” was refined by “fertiliser materials” and was converted into “good quality soil” by the process of alchemy.

One of the goals of alchemy is to refine precious metals from base metals. The

difficulty of this goal is nigh impossible, as even I could never successfully do it. Take lead, a base metal, for example, no matter what you do to it it'll remain as lead, it'd never change into gold, a precious metal. Scientifically, turning lead into gold would require nuclear fusion. Though, I wonder, since in this world magic can be brought into the process, could it be that the process here would be more labour-saving compared to the one in my previous world? Though, this is merely my hypothesis.

Well, to put it in shorter words. Compared to that tremendously difficult task, making a fertiliser from food waste and mix those in into the soil can be said to be completely inconsequential. After all, even if you leave the fertilisers be, the soil would naturally turn like this. It is not difficult to accelerate the process with alchemical application.

Anyhow, at the age of eight I've successfully created artificial skin and artificial muscle as a transplant for Uni's face. The base materials for those were chicken and pork for cooking. Even children aged ten or less can do simple tasks like those. The fact is alchemy is too convenient, though people's evaluation of it is unreasonably low. There is this idea of transplanting artificial flesh and blood into a living body using alchemy, but apparently even in the academic field of alchemy this concept is regarded as heresy, so I couldn't make a formal evaluation. Even that professor never thought of it until I brought it up.

Oh well, enough of that.

"How is it, everyone? Now, the tired soil that bothered you so much has been taken care of... Feel free to plough this land to your hearts' content, and let us reclaim the golden fields of wheat was once upon the land of Marlin once again!"

"YEAAAH.....!"

"YEAAAAAAAAAAH!"

"LONG LIVE THE NEW LORD!"

"GOLDEN FIELDS UPON MARLIN!"

I stirred them up and raised their excitement, and moments later they unanimously chanted words to praise me by their own accord.

Alchemy has embraced the reputation of being dubious, but these poverty-stricken farmers are no-nonsense people. If they can get the soil of their wheat fields that feed

them back to its fertile state then they'd just shut their eyes to no matter what. All I have to do is to repeat this method in the other fields later, and then I suppose I can manage this issue for the time being. Besides, more than anything else this agricultural adjustment would make the soil at its best condition, so there's no need to worry about repeated-cultivation damage. Even if they don't use the Norfolk farming method, there shouldn't be any fallow land. In the first place, I still yet to know how many years would take to reform agriculture in the most perfect way. What I'm afraid of are actually pests and crop diseases, but I'll handle those issues separately, by making pesticides harmless to the human body if possible.

From an average alchemist's point of view, this agricultural adjustment is not a big deal at all. It's like a Columbus' egg, it's something that anyone can do, it's just that there's no technology that can help them to do that exist yet. That is why, if I do this showily, other quick-witted, intelligent nobles might begin their attempt to imitate the method. Though, I'll think about it when the time comes. I don't have the means to stop them anyway. It's not like there's a patent office in this world.

Nonetheless, considering that in this era cold weather and drought could cause famine in a flash, there's nothing wrong if food production regions were to increase. Besides, as we're the forerunners here, we'll be able to accumulate intensive use know-hows of alchemy faster. If we can fully exploit the advantage of being the pioneer, the things that would most likely trouble us won't happen.

As I finish one of my jobs, I raise my gaze to the slaves and brightly say,

"Alright, shall we depart to the next destination then?"

There are still plenty of other fields, and there's a mountain of other things to do.

There's no choice but to use time efficiently here.



"Errrrrr, a little to the left, left... very well, there!"

While looking constantly at the written plan on a time-eaten parchment, I issue my orders.

The one who moves according to my orders is a mud giant that probably reach three

meters in height—— a magical beast, “mud golem”.

“Haa... they’re indeed convenient.”

As he watches the golem carrying out the construction works by using its huge body, Due muttered. In terms of simple combat strength, and especially physical strength, he who was greatly strengthened by the adjustment surgery is much stronger than this giant. However, when it comes to the volume of things that one can transport in a go, it would surely be the giant’s part. Compared to a thing made of mud, earth, and sand, no matter how strong you are as a human, your human arm can only carry so much at once.

“My peerage comes with a great deal of trouble. I can’t do this if I don’t at least have this sort of privilege.”

I looked up at the mud golem as I said so.

Having a peerage and ruling a territory also means that the royal family recognises your military authority in order to maintain your territory. Thereby, one of the exempted matters is the possession of magical beasts. Magical beasts like unicorn or pegasus is akin to tanks or fighter aircraft in my previous world. Of course, it is not allowed to personally possess them. But when you hold a territory, the story is a rather different. As a pacification force in the territory, and as war reserves to serve the royal family in case of emergency, a landlord may reasonably arm themselves with considerable degree of freedom. Of course, this includes possession of powerful magical creatures as well.

Though, it goes without saying the high court’s inspections would restrict a landlord from gathering enough arms that may be directed to overthrow the royal house—— but it doesn’t have anything to do with what we’re doing now, so I’ll stop here.

“Still, what a rich story this is. To think you’d use a magical beast to do something like repair work.”

“Not at all, I feel that this is in fact the proper way to use it. A mud golem of this level, assuming we’re talking the adventurer’s guild subjugation grade, would belong to the likes of D-class to C-class. It’s on the category where you can beat it with a huge margin even before your adjustment. This means even against my combat potential, its class is considerably inferior.”

It may be a harsh remark, but it's the truth. My "masterpiece", Uni, has the ability that surpasses at least that of A-class adventurers. The mass-produced slaves, degraded as they are, were adjusted based on Uni's data. Their ability matches that of a C-class, and possibly B-class if the individual is exceptional. And as we can use basic low-level magic, against a mud golem that is specialised only in physical strength while having low magic resistance, a barrage of attack magic would be enough to end it. In other words, the only pieces I have that is weaker than this golem is probably those former officials who tried to undermine me a while back, and their subordinates.

"That said... There are many parts in this plan that differs from the actual topography."

"Of course that'd be the case... I can tell that the parchment is bloody old just by looking at it. Just what year was it from?"

"I wonder?"

Certainly, just as Due said, this parchment is too old. I've got this one from the archives of that former deputy's mansion where I'm staying right now. From what age does this stuff came from, I have no idea, but the farmers need their irrigation quickly, so I have no choice but to use it.

Shall we make a new irrigation plan, then? That sounds like a good idea.

...Except for the fact that I do not have a talent that can do this amongst my ranks.

Unfortunately, all that I am is an alchemist. It's possible for me to provide technologies and tools that will be useful to do this irrigation job, but I have no skill to devise an irrigation plan myself. That brother of mine, who's now sitting in the royal capital and is still unwilling to send me human resources that may assist me, made the point that I received an education so I can do a job like this. Well, I don't want any part of it so I just thrust it back to him though.

Uni is a maid-cum-escort-cum-assistant-cum-explorer. She performs a wide variety of roles that is enough for her. Besides, it would be a great folly for her to be doing politics would be as it wastes a lot of her resources, and she has no one show her the ropes from anyway. Due is an adventurer that has been living only on his sword, and Drei apparently had led a nomadic life in the desert like a dark elf would. It's not that they both can't really do it, but they can't afford to work for home affairs.

This area, for the camp that is headed by my researcher self, is indeed a weak point.

We excel in technical capabilities and combat prowess, but we lack the political ability that would utilise these potentials organically. Everyone in my ranks has undergone a brain adjustment and the risk of rebellion is extremely small, but if I, as the person on the top, were to make a mistake, the problems would remain unfixed and it's likely that we wouldn't get anywhere.

To put it in other words, it's like a start-up company headed by an engineer as its president. For now as we're doing little things here and there no major problem has happened. But in the near future, the population of this Marlin Viscounty will increase, and while I don't wish this to happen, what would I do if my territory were to increase due to some mistake? There's the risk that I might not be able to cope with newly occurring problems. I should also say that relying on a plan written on a map that looks like it were a map of Tokugawa's buried gold that is most definitely outdated and lacks reliability is a big problem at this time.

"Just from when was this from... Let me check for a bit. '*Detect*'."

I try to measure its age with a simple appraisal magic.

My readings show that the plan was made approximately no less than one hundred fifty years ago. The Oubeniel family was raised to aristocracy two hundred years ago, so this plan was made roughly during the second or the third generation.

Oh, well. Luckily, or unluckily, since this world is reliant on magic, technological advancements have come to a standstill. The range of error should be only to the extent the topographic difference and there shouldn't be any other thing to correct.

Shouldn't be, but.

"...As I thought, in order to rule this land properly, new personnel must be scouted."

"Do you want another run to the slave market again?"

Due's face was a bit averse to the idea. Drei, whom he fancied personally, turned out that way a while back. Apparently for the time being he wouldn't want to step his foot into a slave market anytime soon.

"You're having a needless fear. Even in a slave-trading city there's no way a shop may risk selling a befitting person with enough aptitude in home affairs to shape up the land while there's a risk that they may be bought and sold out to other countries to a

local viscounty. When your house collapses, either you'll find yourself in another house, or you'll be an unemployed waiting to be appointed to another post—— worse case is you'll be executed.”

“If that’s how it goes, why don’t you fish those talents from the unemployed?”

“No way. My viscounty is under the umbrella of my brother’s county. They wouldn’t want to deal with dubious people that show up in the circular between the nobles, ‘the official letter was passed to your older brother, shouldn’t you as his little brother know what’s inside too?’, like that. Well then, my brother is waiting me to make a blunder like that, as he’s helplessly waiting me to give him an opportunity to crush me.”

And then the crushed me would be amongst the ostracised in the noble society. As an alchemist, my research funding source would disappear, but more than anything the wall that is my dignity as a noble that shields me from being murdered outright by my brother would disappear too. My brother may have caused me a great deal of troubles, but the reason why he hasn’t erased me up until now was that he doesn’t want to cross the final line as I’m being protected by the society as a noble. He’s presently slandering me as a slave-murderer to the extent that some would see me with disdain. But while he finds me disgusting, I can’t be killed for that reason. Killing me now would be akin to saying ‘I killed him because he disgusts me, ugh so annoying’.

Consuming slaves as experiment materials would be considered as a troublesome hobby but you can’t be attacked for it. But if I were to make a mistake that couldn’t be overlooked in my territory management, I’d be labelled as incompetent and immediately lose my position. The murdered thing here would be something intangible, which is my position as a noble. The treatment from society would degrade as they’d see me as an insect instead of a human. Then, if one were to say they killed an insect because it disgusted them, no one would bat an eye.

I’ve prepared Uni in case something like that happens, but I’d like to avoid that if possible.

“So, we’re in a deadlock then?”

“...No, we’re not.”

I show a grin to the irritated Due.

“Actually, there’s a way out. Or rather, that way out is actually the usual way to do



things, but I don't want the trouble, so I didn't do it."

"Seriously now, Milord."

"You don't have to be that menacing. It's a truly laborious and troublesome method, I guess we're working like this right now to make room for us to be able to use it."

That's right. That's the reason why I, who pride myself on hating inefficiently, can't come to an agreement with this Kingdom of Arquell. If we're not prepared to a certain extent, not only that we'd waste all the efforts we've made up until this point, we might come into harm's way.

"Well, it's really a common-sense method. As you can see with the Oubeniel family, for noble houses the eldest son isn't the only one there is. Should an emergency befall the heir of the family, the eldest son, there'll be always the second and third son as reserves— and then there's the bastard son."

Perhaps I should add that when I said 'bastard', I mean it in the sense that it's the antithesis of 'the family heir'. It's not like I was recognised by my dead father, in fact in later years before his death he doesn't even want to acknowledge me as his son.

*TL Note: Here he tried to say that he's in a way a "bastard" too, and emphasised that he's referring to illegitimate children that have no chance of succeeding their family.*

"In that case, it's unusual that he'd grant someone like me a territory without any reason whatsoever."

"I see, if granting territory to every child besides the eldest son is the general practice, then the map store would be very busy right now as they'd have to redraw the territorial borders here and there every time there's an inheritance."

Even the tough guy Due apparently understands the reason to that extent.

"Right, that's why there's many of these bastards are being kept in their residences without given any chance to show what they've got, they're really unfortunate in that way. The way for them to prosper is roughly divided into five. First, there's no other successor next in line as the family fortune turns around and all the legitimate sons are suddenly dead. Second, they're adopted into another family whose line of succession is going to extinct. Third, they join the knight corps, and fourth, they join the court as a court magician, those sorts of careers."

“And fifth is?”

“That, huh... well, have you ever wondered why among the adventurers there’d be a kid of a noble every so often? Most of them are there in order to start an enterprise to escape from their house confinement, as they throw themselves out to the world of outlaws with their own ambitions in mind. Even a noble house would not afford itself to feed an idle good-for-nothing, and if they’re dead, at least there one less mouth to feed. It’s just a boring mundane exposure behind those noble stories the bards usually recount.”

I continued my explanation with my faraway look.

“No dreams or hope whatsoever for them, huh.”

So complained Due.

Perhaps, many of the former noble adventurers that he knew were fleetingly gone before any chance for them to grab their glory. Originally, a noble that would choose the path as an adventurer is one who doesn’t have the ability or connection to become a knight. If the only thing they don’t have is the connection, then they may flourish as an adventurer, but what if they don’t have the ability? I don’t have to recount what might become of them. If you have no luck or talent, even if the blue blood of nobility flows inside you, you’ll just end up like that.

“Our talk has been derailed. The fifth is to become a vassal of a house somewhere and then advance from there. They find a nobleman with the lack of vassals like me, and take care of their job as a subordinate. They’d be able to earn their keep compared in a safer way compared to becoming an adventurer without any skills, and to one end it’s possible for them to put on an air of being one of the nobility as well. The employer would also be able to obtain an educated vassal that is still a noble in some degree. This would be an ideal win-win symbiosis, but—-“

“You seem quite hesitant though. Is there a problem with that?”

“There’s a big one. Their ideals, and their common sense as to how they do things... most likely, my brother has already anticipated this from a long time ago. He has the geographical advantage as he’s now in the royal capital anyway. Maybe he’d do something along the lines of lobbying the bastards who are now living in the family mansion to be his spy if his little brother were to invite them as a vassal.”

I wonder if he promised that they'd be treated by their family well if they do a great job at it. For a dependent noble confined to their rooms, there'd be no means to resist the offer. At any rate, the other side is the head of a count family. And in contrast I'm just a viscount under his umbrella.

An unemployed guy who's having a hard time to find a job is being asked by a president of a head office to investigate a branch office for the defiant attitude—- and depending on the situation, interfere with them—-, the situation would be similar to that. On top of being promised with enticing employment conditions after the act, as he may think that his future would be rough, he wouldn't refuse the offer at first. Though I don't think there's a company in my previous world that would do that... there's none, right?

That aside, the reason as to why he's taking the risk of granting me a rank and a territory as a viscount and letting me do as I please with it is because he has this means available. Else he'd kill me upon knowing that I am unnecessarily looking into other nobles, or he'd tacitly keep me in that mansion to continue my experiment until I'm dead. As of the former case, Uni would be able to prevent it, but while I thought the latter should've been his default choice, it's actually the cause of my present situation.

As I've said a few times earlier, nobles who fail in their territory management would be killed without a care, because they'd be judged of having no value to other nobles.

“— But only other nobles would fear that sort of blatant move. Not me.”

“...I know, right?”

Because of the unexpected lavish spending that is Drei, the amount of mass-produced slaves that can be procured is less than I originally planned, but I was still able to replenish their amount. Besides, Drei herself has become rather the valuable tool. All preparation is in place.

As of now, the Viscounty of Marlin has become my nest. If my brother thought he can probe around this place just by reaching out from far away, somewhere like the royal capital, then that'd be the extremity of outrageousness. On the contrary, I'll make it so that his hands will be badly bitten and poison will seep into his fingers.

“Uni, are you here?”

“Yes, I'm by your side.”

When I spoke out, Uni immediately appeared next to me out of nowhere.

To that sight, Due wearily says,

“There was no sign of her at all...”

“That’s because I was erasing my presence.”

“And to think I’m deceived by that, I’m losing my self-confidence here y’know...”

‘Then please be more diligent from now on’, she curtly replied.

I gave her a letter that I’ve kept in advance. It’s a procedural document for official recruitment to be submitted to the royal palace. Although he might take notice of my move, I have no obligation of sending this through my brother even though he’s my superior.

“Mail this for me. If you ask the adventurer’s guild, I believe it’ll be delivered to the royal capital in no time.”

“As you wish, Master.”

After I saw her disappearing without a sound, I return my gaze to the mud golem that’s still carrying on with the construction job.

That giant of a magical beast is doing its duty autonomously, according to its master’s order.

# Chapter 11

## An Afternoon in Broussonne

It was on a certain day when the young head of the count family of Oubeniel, Linus Streinn Oubeniel, had an unexpected visitor.

“Pardon me for the sudden visit, Count.”

*TL Note: Since this'll be lost in translation, I'll just say it here. The marquis speaks in a way I'd call “an old man's grammar”. If you're familiar with contemporary animanga, if I were to give an example, Shinobu Oshino of the monogatari series speaks this way.*

“Not at all, humble as I am, I still have the honour of being one of the kingdom's noble. And as someone like me have generously been granted the post of a Count, to prepare for sudden arrivals is among my routine obligations—— Marquis-sama.”

While hiding his reservations in his softly-wrapped words, Linus generously bowed to that person.

The guest's name was Marquis Lavallée. He was an old man whose face had already wrinkled and whose pony had already turned completely grey. Despite being a great noble who boasted a large fief, he had been preaching the threats of foreign countries and had been appealing for unity under the royal family. So to speak, he was the distinguished head figure of a faction known as the centralists.

—— ‘Who are the centralists?’ you might ask. They were those who believe that in order to keep the stability of their appointed territories, safeguarding the royal family should be the first priority of the nobility.

In regard to that belief, Linus himself was a thorough opposition.

But whatever thoughts he had inside his belly, the other party was a rank higher than him. For the young Linus who was lower in position, he couldn't help but to humble himself before him.

“Just so happens, I've gotten quite the fine tea. If it pleases you, please have some.”

“Oh, aren’t you kind. Let us have some then.”

Linus somehow managed to hold the sound of his clicking tongue from leaking.

Truthfully, he had wanted to enjoy the prime tea for himself. Even if he couldn’t, at least he wanted to drink it with a person his heart would permit. He didn’t want to give the ghastly geezer, who was attempting to repress the lords by using the influence of the royal family, a drop of his premium tea at all. But in the unlikely event that if a story of him hogging quality tea from his visitor were to leak out, and when people learn of it, it’d be inevitable that he’d get to be the laughing stock of the noble society. And his reputation, which is already low due to that idiotic little brother of his, would fall even further.

‘Thanks to that monster, even that I’m the head of a Count family now, I can’t even enjoy a cup of tea freely... ’

Holding his abashed inner thoughts in secret, he ordered the butler to prepare the tea.

Linus guided the marquis to a terrace that faced the streets. There were still cremated traces of the experimental bodies that his brother incinerated in his gardens. He didn’t want the marquis to see that.

“Oh, we’re having tea while gazing the capital’s cityscape, huh?”

“...I humbly thought you’d prefer so.”

As he felt like he was being pried as to why they didn’t go to the gardens instead, he went as far as speaking unnecessary words to the marquis.

‘I don’t suppose you’d be interested in gardens which boast the glory of the feudal lords, do you? Since you frantically scrape our territories and present them to the royal family, at most, you’d take comfort in gazing at this city’s scenery—- your owner, the king’s own backyard.’

It was a remark that may be interpreted as so. To put it in a remark that doesn’t put the fault on anyone else, it was, in other words, a slip of the tongue.

As he gave Linus, who realised such and covered his mouth with his hand, a sideward glance, Marquis Lavallée graciously brought the black tea to his mouth. Did he fail to realise it, or did he turn a blind eye to it? When he thought of how many years the

other party had dabbled in the world of politics, he felt that it must've been the latter.

The marquis savoured two, three sips of the ruby-coloured liquid without a sound, and raised his face.

"It has the flavour of the southern lands. These leaves had been planted in a place with plenty of sun. Did it come from Omnia? And, it was picked during the early days of summer... you have quite the fine taste, Count."

"Thank you for your kind words."

As annoying as it was, it was the correct reply. Had he gave an absurd reply here, as he remarked before, he'd be made a laughing stock later.

With his eyes bent to the shape of a smile, Linus veiled his hostility. Before him, the marquis was leisurely grabbing sweets and enjoying his black tea.

"Hmmm, you thought of these things that'd go well with the tea too, huh? You're still young, but you're well versed in hospitality. Well then, I've had the treat to my heart's content. Shall I go to the main issue behind my visit today, then?"

"Yes, let me hear so."

Linus gave a resolute reply to the smiling good-natured old man as he put his cup. The marquis had completely taken control of the pace. The marquis' approach was thoroughly gentle, but he couldn't explain this stiffness he was feeling. It was as if the youngster was being twisted around the old politician's fingers.

So what, he thought.

In the first place, for him to be dragged away by the flow that this middle-aged schemer had created was a mistake from the very beginning. For a greenhorn like him, of course no matter what he does he'd be swept away anyway. So he daringly steeled himself. At any rate he hardened his defenses, for now he could only hope he didn't end up completely in the other party's control.

To him who was steeling his thoughts, the marquis showed him a paper as he spread it on the table.

"The other day, there was this notification that arrived in the court. The sender is your

brother.”

“This is... a petition for open recruitment in the royal capital in order to employ new vassals, huh.”

He thought his brother would do that. His brother was sent out without even a decent assistant in order to ensure that he would take that step. He had intended to take advantage of this and send people he had taken a hold on to conduct secret investigations and seize something that could choke the life out of Tullius.

But of all things, to think that it'd cross over to someone like Marquis Lavallée.

‘That fool...! Don't you realise this geezer is an enemy to you too!?’

A bloodthirsty old wolf that had been doing literally everything in his capacity to shave away the other nobles' territory. Such was the true identity of the marquis. A newly appointed viscount that was sent to a newly established territory was nothing but an easy prey. But why must Linus' weakness be exposed in the process as well?

...He was truly behaving like a moron.

If he did this without any intention whatsoever, then this was truly preposterous. If Tullius managed to figure out Linus' plan then planned to hand Linus over to his political opponent as a response, then he could only think that Tullius had a poor sense in politics. Once more, the old nobleman is not only a potential enemy to Linus, but to Tullius too.

Successfully turning an enemy of an enemy as an ally is just a temporary thing. Perhaps, it only exists in the dramas of fabricated heroic tales. In reality, the most it'll go is to follow the parable that the hunting dog would be cooked after the nimble rabbit is dead. In this case, it was like Tullius was attacking Linus with fire, and in the process lit the fire that'd actually boil himself in the stove later.

Still, this was about that mad alchemist. There was also the possibility that he just casually sent the petition to the royal capital while knowing nothing about politics. Either way, he was just beyond help. Linus didn't plan to help him from the beginning, but if Tullius wished for ruin, Linus wished that it'd be for Tullius alone.

“This is truly embarrassing. I'm sorry that the shame of this house has stained your ears.”



“I suggest you stop referring it as such. This was out of your hatred against your little brother, yes?”

‘What audacious words’, he thought to himself. If he were to affirm those words, it’d mean that he admitted that he did not do enough for the territory that was bestowed by the king out of his personal feelings. Although that was indeed a fact, it wasn’t a fact Linus could honestly confirm in front of the opponent before him.

In front of his biggest enemy in this city, he had no choice but to suffer the pains of praising the man he hated the most in the world.

“E, even I’m dazzled with my brother’s ingenuity... I wondered if, with that talent, even with this sort of vassals, it’d still be sufficient for him to manage his territory. Ha, hahaha... ha.”

The corner of his mouth formed an amiable smile, but he could feel that it was now convulsing as it cramped. It was as if his mouth was rotting.

The marquis laughed pleasantly.

“Hohohohoh! Is that so, is that so? Well, people management is indeed a hard thing, it’s usual to try and get used to it, Count.”

“...Yes, it’s as you say.”

‘I’ll kill him. I’ll definitely kill this man after I’m done with Tullius.’

While strengthening such intention in secret, he tried to look normal and asked.

“Then, it’s my idiotic brother’s petition but, what are you planning to do with it?”

Did he take the trouble to bring this here personally just to say that he was going to kill the petition? Or was he planning to let Linus send his men to Tullius and settle the recruitment at Linus’ initiative? That way he could sell his favour to the young member of the opposing faction, and plan to estrange him from his faction then. That seemed to be possible, but,

“What do you mean, what am I planning to do with it?”

“...Huh?”

To Linus whose eyes and mouth went round at that unexpected answer, the old noble leaked out a terrible smile,

“The approval has already been issued.”

“...HUH!?”

The young count finally couldn't keep his appearance and sprung up.

To him, the old marquis pointed at the spread document.

“Take a closer look, this document is a copy. The original document has already been approved, and the open recruitment will commence in no time. In the near days, the news will arrive to you too in some way. I'm actually here today to tell you beforehand so that it won't needlessly embarrass you later on.”

“Wh, wh, wha...!?”

Now that he mentioned it, the ink smelt like new, and there was no sign that the paper had endured rain or wind. The contents had been written recently on a brand-new paper.

In the first place, how come did he not realise that it was written on paper? As the kingdom's nobility valued tradition and formalities, formal documents would usually be parchments. No matter how Tullius treat the common sense of the nobility with disdain, he would at least adhere to that, and even if he didn't the geezer didn't comment on it.

The fact that he couldn't even notice that, Linus couldn't stop his face from going red.

Marquis Lavallée gently said,

“I coincidentally happened to know about the open recruitment before the announcement. As so, I've put forward the children of some of my acquaintances.”

“What, did you say?”

While he put a question mark on his words, as expected his thoughts were stiff. At the same time as Linus had exposed his weak point to the centralist, it'd be inevitable that the marquis would send his protégé,s whom he had taken a hold on, to Tullius as well.

As he thought, the old man would not casually do things like leaving Tullius to his own devices.

Then why were he telling Linus all this?

“Don’t you have to choose talents for your little brother, too? Make early response to the open recruitment.”

“.....”

“Let us bring the lovely brothers together, shall we, Count?”

‘Ah, so that’s it’. Linus finally understood.

The discord between Linus and Tullius, and Tullius’ de facto expulsion from the royal capital to Marlin—- The marquis, who saw the full picture, had also predicted that Linus would take advantage of the employee procurement and send a spy to investigate Tullius. And by showing that their movements were in sync, he aimed so that other people thought that he had joined hands with Linus.

That way, people would see that the house of Count Oubeniel had given in to the centralist faction. Not only that the house would completely lose its influence on the faction hostile to the marquis, he would also forfeit Linus’ authority by branding him as a defector. Then won’t Linus, who was to be incorporated unwillingly to the faction, be a treacherous ally to the centralists? It ought to be so.

However, if things were to proceed according to this scenario, the established fact would remain that Linus, as much as he didn’t want to, had borrowed the help of the marquis and conspired against his brother. It’d be an enormous debt to the centralists. If he were to ignore this debt, it would mean that he ignored a debt so large the other house would never associate with him out of his ingratitude. From here on after, the house of Oubeniel was about to be forced into a situation that he wouldn’t be able to keep up with. And should he fail to keep up, no one would help him. The centralists would see him as a tossed-over newcomer and the lords who oppose the centralists would see him as an irredeemable traitor. And even when someone were to grant him a hand, they’d just use the new debt as a pretext in order to devour him whole. If he didn’t want things to go that way, he had no choice but to obey this old politician...

Linus was stunned as he realised those facts.

The marquis gave him a sidelong glance, and then steadily stood up.

“Excuse me, apparently I have stayed for a little too long, I have an appointment to meet with others after this too, let us end it here for today.”

His words and deeds implied the association between them from there on, as expected, Linus didn't guess wrong. However, he couldn't do anything about it nonetheless.

‘Please wait for a moment, Your Excellency!’

To Linus who stood up discourteously as he kicked up the chair when he stood up, Marquis Lavallée smiled.

“I'll introduce you plenty to a friend I'll meet later. ‘He's a bit of a late bloomer, but he's clever young man’, like that.”

“...Kuh.”

The meaning of those words were actually like these,

—— You're not stupid, but against conspiracies you're too passive. You're not diligent enough, youngster.

—— I'll give you a passing mark for noticing the plan at the very, very end, but other than that there are a lot of shortages. Especially against this gimmick, as you couldn't come up with an effective method right away, and such is unsatisfactory.

That sort of harsh evaluation.

‘I've been had...!’

On top of completely being swayed by the other party, his caliber was also seen through as well. Perhaps the spread copied paper before him was also a test as well. The fact that Linus could see through him in the end wasn't at all a big blow. After all, the old man had set a likely winning plan long before he visited the mansion.

“Ah, that's right, ‘his tastes, when it comes to tea, was good’, I'll tell him that too.”

In the end, with that declaration of victory, the marquis left the terrace.

Linus didn't follow him. He couldn't even figure out what to do after this.

It was a complete defeat.

A little after Lavallée's figure disappeared,

"...SHIT!"

There was a loud sound as the teaware on the table was broken.

Cups, saucers, pots that the hands of master craftsmen have fashioned, everything was broken.

He stomped on the broken pieces with the heel of his shoes, over and over again.

Until everything was broken into small fragments, his anger won't be settled. It won't be sorted out.

"...HIH!?"

Suddenly, he turned to the voice from behind him in reflex.

There stood a shabby looking woman, though not to the extent of looking filthy, barely.

The housekeeping slave screamed at the appearance of Linus who furiously damned the wares.

The slave, who appeared there to tidy up, was looking at him as if she was looking at a monster.

"What's with those eyes...?"

"N, no, err..."

As he stared back, the slave shivered as she retreated.

'What's with that?'

'Why are you looking at me with those eyes?'

‘...Is it because this mansion had that ‘Slave Murderer’ monster once?’

‘...And because of that, you’re looking at me with that same eye as if you’re looking at that monster?’

“Don’t look at me with those eyes!”

He reflexively casted the obedience magic and caught the slave’s body.

As his magic force came into effect, her eyelids were forcibly shut tight.

“Ple, please stop, Master!”

While being confused by the sudden closed sight, the slave prostrated and begged for forgiveness.

Her pitiable voice was making him grow in irritation.

In the past, this kind of voice used to come from this mansion’s basement.

The man who should’ve been expelled to the far lands of Marlin at this time, the second son, Tullius.

It was the same voice they raised as he tortured the slaves.

“You’re noisy, shut up! Why must I listen to such a voice right now!? Why must I look at such a face right now!?”

While screaming, he straddled the woman and hit her cheeks.

He hit her over, over, over, and over.

Every time he hit her, the slave would beg forgiveness with her pathetic voice. In the midst of the beating, as she wasn’t being heard, her voice went blur in resignation.

‘This slave is unpleasant in every sense of the word. As I keep her around me she should’ve been chosen because her looks were good, but the sycophantic face she’s giving me right now is just nauseating. Her swollen up face after I hit her, it reminds me of that first slave my brother picked up.’

‘...I seemed to have gone insane.’

‘This frustration, this anger, this revulsion, I must discharge them at once.’

As if he were diligently following something similar to an obligation, Linus grabbed the slave’s clothes.

“Stop... ah, what are...? Stop, st——”

Even she forbade him to see, she had already instinctively realised what was going to happen to her. The slave was just attempting a vain refusal.

However—

As in worn-out stories, the sound of her clothes ripping resembled a certain shriek somewhere.



“Haaaah... haaaah... haaaaaaaah...”

When he realised it, it was already nighttime.

The anger in his belly had greatly subsided. The stewards seemed to be in an awkward state, it was actually fine if they want to speak.

As he thought so, Linus realised.

Given the condition, a person with tact would hesitate from talking to him right now.

The slave that was the object to vent his anger stretched the remains of her clothes to the utmost so as to cover her body though barely. She was crying. She was crying as if she couldn’t believe her lord could do something so cruel to her.

Now that he thought it, even as a slave, he had treated the woman well. Even though in the old days the house would go as far as killing slaves guilty of misconduct.

This, too, was also because of Tullius. Because he killed slaves often, his father and he had ceased to raise our hands against the slaves out of fear of our image in public.

And yet, this woman did not distinguish him from that devil.

He hadn't raised his hands against her until this very day, and yet she still looked at him with those eyes.

"You look unsightly, slave."

"Hiii..."

"I'm done with you. Get lost."

As she was coldly threatened, the slave tremblingly crawled away from her spot and left. Probably she couldn't feel her waist and thus couldn't stand. It was truly an ugly sight. The handprints that were still vivid even in the moonlight on her pathetically exposed butt were probably from him. The memory when he did it was vague.

"...Kuh, what on earth am I doing!?"

Out of humility and sense of defeat after the marquis had gotten him good, his conducts were utterly unspeakable as a head of a Count family, like destroying expensive teaware or hitting slaves after his anger couldn't be settled.

Worst of it all was that he had crossed the final line. If things were to go awry, it may result in Linus' first child. The child would be a bastard with slave blood mixed in them. And if that happens, it'd be the choice between the purity of blood that the noble society put an emphasis of value on, or the taboo of killing slaves.

'...Should I kill her?'

The thought ran in Linus' mind at this time.

But, that was no good for him. To kill a slave after treating it arbitrarily,

It was as if---

"...Won't it make me the same as Tullius...?!"

'The fact that we shared the same blood is a heresy I couldn't bear to think of. Besides, I don't want to fall to his level...' His perception was warped, but in the end Linus was able to keep his decency.



But still, Tullius had been such an annoying brother. The cause of the issue this time too was stemmed from the fact that he sent the petition in a way that was most likely to be perceived by Marquis Lavallée. No matter how much he didn't want to hand the petition over to Linus, he should've given it to any other party but him. He could've handed it over to a member of the opposing decentralist faction, or even if he chose to hand it over to a member of the centralists, the person on their lowest seat could handle his case too. Had he simply wanted to harass his older brother, he could've chosen plenty of people that are more reasonable. But why of all people would he choose the worst among them?

Again, Linus reaffirmed that that thing was indeed a demon, 'Tullius Shernan Oubeniel... That man, as long as he exists in the world, he'll continue to be the cause that inclines this house of Oubeniel into disaster', like that.

Now that he thought about it, ever since he was born, he was always like that. When Tullius was born, his mother passed away. From what he could recall, his mother was a timid woman. When it came to their father, she couldn't take the high hand. She always had this face that as if she had wanted to say something to him. However, she was always kind to Linus. While he didn't have a particular drawback, he was rather the mediocre child, and so he was severely disciplined by his father whom had been impatient to produce an excellent heir. While it was thanks to him that he was in his position now, his father, who ignored his own foolishness while forcing unreasonable things to him even when he was a child, was no favourite of his. Linus believed he could endure those days because his mother in her two-facedness had protected him and comforted him. It was Tullius who killed his mother. Although she passed away during her postpartum recovery, it still didn't change the fact that his mother was gone for the sake of the existence of that thing.

As father grew older, he began to favour Tullius who had been shrewd even during his childhood. He treated Linus coldly and abandoned him like a toy he had gotten tired of, as he spent most of his childhood and grow up watching his little brother getting spoiled by his father. Now that he recalled those times, his brother had been abnormal since then. Although he learned his words late, by the time when he was four year old he had begun to use speech that could put adults to shame, and in the blink of an eye he mastered elementary magic. Their father applauded him as a prodigy and a genius, but Tullius himself had always had this cold face. Rather than calling him a child, he was like a young devil with an adult's eyes.

His father, who had casted away his firstborn son out of disappointment, would had

the expectation that he had on his little brother betrayed too. Alchemy, something that even lowly tricksters would steer clear from. For some reason he had become engrossed in it. Their father, who tried to divert my brother's interest away from alchemy, allowed him to buy a slave for him to learn about people management, but the one he chose was a dying child with a crushed face. Linus thought he was insane. His father thought so as well. But the most insane thing out of it was his abilities. By self-taught alchemy and simple recovery magic, he had perfect restored someone who was half-dead to life. His father, though with a stiff face, rewarded Tullius, then took a distance and let him do whatever he wanted for a while. It was probably done out of the balance between his revulsion and his concern of his child's talent as a father. Although, it turned out to be the biggest mistake ever.

He probably took his father's tacit approval of alchemy into consideration. From then on, Tullius began to be completely absorbed in erratic research. He skillfully charged his first slave as his assistant, and then he began to sell original potions and with that he obtained a source of funding independent of the house. With those funds, he started to buy one slave after another, then he killed them under the pretext of experiment. At the time when everything was discovered, just how many had he killed? To his father, who lost his complexion as he inquired Tullius, he impudently replied,

("Father, doesn't the law state, 'the master is allowed to anything to their slave'? If that's the case, then I suppose there's no problem here." )

And.

("Also, most noblemen kill their slaves out of their tantrum, but here they were dead because of a promising experiment. Oh, and as an additional remark, it's not like they were dead because I wanted to kill them. It's just that most of them die when I conduct my experiment. There's plenty of slaves that are still alive too, like Uni, see?" )

He thought that it was the very words of the devil. His father probably thought so too, as his face went green while he grabbed Tullius' hand, and then dragged him to the shrine and cried to the priest, 'please expel the devil from my child!'.

However, unbelievably, the devil didn't possess him. Neither the detection magic nor the sacred relics were able to find the presence of evil from him. The shocking thing was when Tullius, as if he was making sure himself, began to recite the words of the scripture from his memory, and in turn won the favour of the priest. That dog of a priest must've been a sham, and until now Linus still thought so. If that wasn't a trick

of the devil, then where in the world does the devil reside? No, the priest judged that he 'wasn't possessed'. That probably meant Tullius himself was the devil.

And since then, every day was hell for the house of Oubeniel. Experiments using the slaves in the basement continued, and the dead slaves were frequently cremated in the gardens. The putrid smell of dead bodies, along with the smell of burning flesh stuck here and there, vassals found their minds deteriorating, and later there was no end to people who elected to resign and leave.

Not once or twice had Linus himself heard young low-ranked nobles who were supposed to be lower than him in rank sneering, 'the surroundings of that Oubeniel's mansion always smell'. When doing transactions with the merchants in town, he'd hear people disparagingly begin their words with 'that Oubeniel house...'. The tradition and dignity of the count house of Oubeniel were ruined by the existence of Tullius alone.

When their father fell ill and a number of slaves that survived the experiments began to imitate the mansion's housekeeping servants, Linus, who could no longer contain himself, drove his brother out to the neighbouring country. His destination was the magic academy. 'If you want to research things, then feel free to do so as much as you want. But at least, do it far away from our sight'———— but that was a vain wish. the fiend came back to the mansion in just a year. He made this fuss about dueling, and smeared the name of his house yet again.

Shortly after Tullius returned home, their father died. Their father, who was frightened of Tullius up until then, couldn't even leave an articulate will. Linus hated his father, but more so, he pitied him. No, it was terrible. With their father gone, that would mean that slave murderer who went insane because of alchemy would be his only immediate family.

And now, Tullius was running upon the path of ruin, and dragged Linus to accompany him in the process. They were completely caught in spider web weaved by Marquis Lavallée.

"...AAAAAH, SHIT! AGAIN AND AGAIN, THAT DEVIL!"

As he shouted to himself, he scratched his head with both of his hands.

After he recalled half of his lifetime, he was convinced. The cause of all the mess in

Linus Streinn Oubeniel's life was none other but his little brother, Tullius. Had he not existed, the conflict between him and his father would be inevitable, but it'd be more peaceful than what he was having now, at the very least the other noble houses would perceive them properly as a noble. And had that fiend wasn't harboured in his mother's womb, she'd be still alive right now.

"As I thought, I have to kill him."

Otherwise, this house couldn't be saved. Now it would perhaps be hard to avoid the house of Oubeniel from being incorporated into the centralist faction of Marquis Lavallée. Some of the house's territory might be taken away as well.

But in exchange, Tullius will be killed. He had been the root of evil in the family. If he didn't cut that off, there'll be no survival nor a damned thing for the house. Since it had come to this, be it the marquis or anyone else, if they could help him then he'd take their help. He couldn't choose the method. Of course, if he were to refuse the offer out of solicitude, then the centralist factions would crush him as well. After Tullius is crushed, the faction would use him until he's crushed as well, and thus either way the end would still be the same.

Still, until he could get rid of that helplessly idiotic brother, he had no choice but join his hands with theirs.

"Ah, yes indeed. To turn the devil himself into an enemy... If it wasn't him, I'd be gladly to join my hands with anyone."

Even monsters like Lavallée would be better than the devil.

When he thought so, he felt his mind cleared up a bit.

If Tullius was to be killed, he thought that the current situation was not a pessimistic one. He could increase his pieces, as he could now use the talents in the marquis' camp.

...Of course, he'll rack up quite the severe debt. But, fortunately Linus was still young. That old fox of a marquis, old fox as he was, have piled up quite the months and years. As if he was to die young, as long as he wasn't a real monster, he'd definitely die sooner than him. If he can endure until then, it'll be Linus' victory.

"What is it that made me so disarrayed..."

Had his accumulated anger been completely cleared away? Somehow, he felt strangely jolly. Now that he thought of what happened before, he felt a little sorry for that slave. 'But, well, isn't it fine. At most, let's just pay her a sum for some time as an apology later'. More or less, if he were to think about, the fact that the Count had joined hands with others wouldn't be spread too far to the public.

Rather than such a thing, Linus couldn't bear to wait until he could quickly grab a hold on his brother's secret, and kill him.

Suddenly, the night wind stroked his cheek.

As he gazed outside the window, there was crescent hanging on the sky. The young count's lips was distorted as if to follow that shape.

"Tullius. You are, after all, a mere naked king attended by those slaves. Before the ploy of true nobility, I'll let you and your lowly slaves know how helpless you are——"

# Chapter 12

## Gleaning <First Half>

The mornings of an unemployed had always been early.

At the very least, that case was true for Jean-Jacques Laubert, the fourth son of a certain baron house.

In his house, where her older and younger sisters had already been married off and his illegitimate brothers had already joined the lowest rank of the knights' order, men without a job were seen in a stern manner.

Day after day, from early morning he would go around and make visits to find a lord to serve, and when he got rejected he'd go to an eatery and eat cheap lunch that commoners would usually eat, then he'd go to the library to study in order to prepare for that someday when he finally gets employed, and then he'd return home to his parents' disappointment. Every day was like that.

The number of fellow young nobles his age who were in similar circumstances as him was unexpectedly large. Some of his acquaintances pointlessly gave up their urban lives, like going to the countryside in search for a lord, or training in order to become a knight, or apparently leaving in order to become an adventurer. But mostly, these people would choose to resign themselves to a life where they were uselessly kept and idly spend their days from dawn to dusk.

And then there's the latter group who would begin to hang around with some people from the underworld that were out looking for noble connections, and then they'd commit crime with their privilege which the commoners don't have. In the beginning, they'd usually abuse their family name to extort people, but when they get worse, the kind of business where they'd set the good-looking women among their servants and accuse them of a crime to enslave them also existed as well.

Jean-Jacques Laubert had seen plenty of his peers who went along that course ultimately smeared mud upon their family name as they to prison and then disappeared. He mustn't end up like that, no, he didn't want to end up like that. And with that wholehearted intent, he was walking around that day too in order to find a

house that would be willing to employ him.

Laubert thought that the royal capital would be the most ideal place in order to do such activities. Even if one would go to the rural nobles, at the end of the day the territory, which had been developed for generations, would form a wall, and there'd be very little room for the new vassals to enter. For that matter, as an extension of court politics, not a few noble in the royal capital would seek to be placed in the rural areas. Take the following example, when a certain feudal lord's house got crushed, their vassals would also be implicated and punished as well. For newly titled nobles, it would surely be in their nature to seek out vassals who don't carry guilty conscience with them as they were stained by other houses' colours. He anticipated such demand.

And that was why Laubert had a weakness for rumours. He'd keep track of such and such feudal lord that were known to be dealing in suspicious practices, which would most likely be hunted down by their political enemy. And based on information he'd guess which house was going to get crushed, and take a note of the name of the noble that would most likely be replacing their post. He did all that so he could get a job.

In a sense, it was quite the wicked habit. Because that would mean that every day he was waiting for a noble house to destroy itself by misfortune.

And so, when the young noble that was Jean-Jacques saw the bulletin board when he was making his regular rounds to look for a job after he left his house early in the morning as usual, his eyes went round.

## ***URGENT RECRUITMENT***

### ***Vassal Employment Notice***

*Newly-established territory of a Viscount house, Marlin Viscounty, Walden Province.*

*We are recruiting personnel to be involved with the new administration in this territory.*

*Are you interested to work in a picturesque, naturally rich land?*

*Experienced personnel are preferred, but those without experience are welcome to apply.*

*Ours is a homely workplace where you can consult with your superiors in ease...*

And so on, and so on.

For a summons from a titled noble, the wording was unbelievably humble, and at the same time, it also gave an indescribably cheap impression.

“Hey, fourth son of the Laubert house. You saw that too, huh?”

The one who called Laubert out to ask Laubert was a fellow unemployed illegitimate son. He had been looking for a job in the royal capital as well, and they had been competing through several recruitment quota. Well, as a result, these two were still in that state of affairs together.

“Yes, well, since I look for a job everyday... But still, this bulletin is...”

“Odd, yeah? Though the benefits offered seem to be good enough...”

As that acquaintance of him said, the amount of salary written on the lower part of the bulletin was quite decent. While it wasn't a spectacular amount, it was still a fair one. After living expenses, you can still spend for your hobby and save. And depending on how you plan it, you might get some women too.

“I haven't heard of this Marlin. I know that Walden Province is to the far southeast of the capital, but where in Walden is it?”

“Even for you, who read books every day, it still doesn't ring a bell. How come I'd know about it?”

So he told him, and he agreed so.

At any rate, from the catchphrase “picturesque, naturally rich land”, it'd probably be somewhere deep in the countryside.

The acquaintance sighed deeply.

“Even if we got accepted, we'd be living in the countryside huh...”

“Don't ask for too much. Even if you keep dragging yourself around the capital, it'll just be hardship for you.”

Laubert told him so as if he was telling that to himself.



Every day his parents would look at his face and the contents of their purse successively, his sisters who had already gotten married into other houses in their various fussy habits kept telling him to get a job, and on top of those his younger brothers had recently begun to see him as some sort of a competitor.

*TL Note: the original word for successively was 見比べ, which means to look in comparison. In this context it was meant to put his remarks sarcastically (and rather humourously) in a self-depreciative way, but since it's a bit hard to make sense of it in English, I used successively instead, though any better wording would be welcomed.*

Rather than remaining there where there was no prospect for him, he wondered whether he should take the plunge and get on with the offer.

While thinking so, he read the continuation of the bulletin.

“...‘Lord of Marlin Viscounty, Royal Viscount Tullius Shernan Oubeniel’...huh?”

It was an unpleasant name he hadn’t heard for a while.

Perhaps his face was rather full of suspicion, as his acquaintance puzzledly asked him.

“Are you familiar with that name? Come to think of it, you don’t just study, you also listen to rumours too, huh?”

“Well, more or less... these stories rather lacked credibility though...”

With those words as a preface, he summarised it for him.

Tullius Shernan Oubeniel, the second son of the Oubeniel house.

He was a man with quite the unfavourable rumour. When he was younger he was known for his intelligence, but later he was instead known for his eccentricity as he indulged himself in alchemy. It was said that he bought a number of slaves all at once, killed them all and called their murder “an experiment”, it was also said that the maid who was always seen serving beside him was actually a corpse he revived. He was sort of a mystery man with those kinds of absurd rumours surrounding him. But while the authenticity of such information was unclear, it was indeed true that he bought slaves at an unusual pace, and a dubious light from his residence’s garden— which was said from the flame that was used to incinerate the dead slaves— was often witnessed.

“At the very least, I’m sure that he’s an eccentric one. He rarely shows up in social occasions, and I haven’t heard him getting engaged with any daughter of any other houses.”

“Although he’s a second son, he’s still in the bloodline of a Count family. It’s rather weird that he doesn’t look for a bride at all...”

“That’s what I heard. Even now, his older brother, the head of the family, is still struggling to find a marriage candidate due to his younger brother’s poor reputation, but I digress.”

In short, he wasn’t a respectable noble. Laubert concluded so.

His acquaintance groaned as he folded his arms,

“And while that kind of guy is a viscount, we’re unemployed?”

“Stop it, don’t say something so saddening like that...”

In short, it was just a matter of lineage.

The second child of the Oubeniel family in question, even with his problematic (?) personality was still a son of a powerful family, and thus there was a proper path for him to progress there. The illegitimate sons of a baron, a baronet or a knight, no matter how respectable they were, would have nothing but an uphill struggle for them. Still their conditions were still more considerably preferable compared to commoners who hardly received any education at all.

“So, Laubert. What are you going to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb now. Are you taking this on or not?”

As he said that to him, Laubert pondered.

It was for certain that the viscount, the second son of Oubeniel house, was an infamous noble. If he was asked to swear loyalty to him, the answer would be none other than no. However, he did find the charm in the task to turn the viscounty around for the better. Laubert thought that he was more suitable to do official work rather than being

a knight or an adventurer. And opportunities for illegitimate children of poor nobles to have such a job were scarcer than he thought.

Practically, there was only one answer.

“I’m on. I’m not happy with the lord’s hobby, but I can’t afford to be picky here. Even if it’s in the countryside in the far southeast or wherever, I’ll have a go at it.”

“I suppose so. Well, I have the same sentiment.”

‘Let’s put our all this time too’, so his acquaintance said as he tapped his shoulder.

It’ll be another competition with him. There’ll be no grudge as to whoever would be employed in the end. It was their pact when they see each other for the first time, and it was still continuing then. Both of them were in this predicament. How will it turn out this time?



Tullius Shernan Oubeniel couldn’t leave his territory, and so the interviews for his vassal recruitment would be held there. Generously, his party would be the one covering their travel expenses. Laubert’s acquaintance was pleased that they’d be paid in gold, but that made Laubert to form a different opinion.

“He promised a good salary, and he covered the costs of this journey, apparently he’s not good at counting money...”

While being rocked in the large horse-drawn omnibus, Laubert murmured. He was riding a carriage bound for Marlin from the royal capital. All of the candidates were divided and placed in several large carriages that will take them to the site. So far there had been no noble who would spend so much for interview candidates whose employment was still undecided. If the number of candidates were this much, then it’d be fine for him to let the candidates pay for their own travel expenses and high-handedly wait them there. Had Oubeniel was blessed by a wealthy land then this’d make more sense to Laubert, but the Walden Province supposedly wasn’t that very rich of a territory. In other words, such facts implied that Viscount Oubeniel knew nothing about bookkeeping or labour management.

As his sharp ears caught that remark, his acquaintance, who was sitting beside him,

snapped into the conversation.

“But, why would you find it strange? From what I’ve heard, hasn’t he been earning from the sales of his own potions?”

“Accounting for personal business and the economy of a territory are two different things. For a long time the viscount has been employing only slaves, hasn’t he? They don’t need salary or good treatment. So it’s different from us, who, despite being lower in rank than him, still belong to the nobility. That is why it would probably be correct to deem him naïve, though I don’t know to what extent.”

Certainly, in order to learn about people management, some nobles would grant their children slaves first. But the lesson that one can take from it, like from a children’s textbook, would be the first step among the first steps. Normally, as they grow older, they would be entrusted with the children of their commoner vassals, then someone of their same age from the lower-ranked nobility, and then a senior assistant would be assigned to their side. That way to learn about managing people would be the usual way for a noble to study to be a good leader.

Laubert had yet to meet Oubeniel, but from his point of view, Tullius Oubeniel apparently was missing such experience entirely.

It was then,

“Oh, aren’t you talking about quite the interesting thing.”

A well-dressed young man cut into their conversation.

The acquaintance was making rather the suspicious face.

“...Who are you?”

“Apologies. I am—-“

Apparently the young man was the youngest, and furthermore, an illegitimate child of a certain count.

He had a lot of siblings so a job was very hard to come by for him, he said he responded to this recruitment opportunity because he had already ran out of patience.

“You’re one of the sons of Baron Laubert’s house, yes? I’ve been listening to your eye-opening analysis since a while back now.”

“No, it was just a mere conjecture...”

“No need to be humble about it. Your analysis was rational and it was truly magnificent— it’s just that...”

The young man glanced over his surroundings.

“All these people riding this carriage with us are competitors for the official posts. If you talk too much, they might use it to slander you.”

As he told him so, Laubert realised his fault. They were now heading for Tullius Shernan Oubeniel’s place in order to implore him to accept them into his service. So to backbite him there by spouting forth conjectures regarding the man would be a careless thing. If by any chance his remarks were to reach viscount’s ears, it’d surely invite his displeasure. It would be as if they were narrowing a gate that was already narrow in the first place by their very own hands.

“I’m thankful for your advice.”

“Not at all. Don’t mind it.”

The young man smiled. He had a good lineage, and surely his hope of being on official would be granted first. In the noble society that put a heavy emphasis on pedigree, even if he was illegitimate, the fact that he lineage was that of a count would tally heavily in his favour. Probably, he kindly advised his competitors to show that margin between them.

“Now that I gave you my advice, mind if we talk? I don’t know a lot of faces here.”

“I suppose.”

A lot of people in the carriage were children of low-ranked nobles. For him who came from the house of a count, surely he’d not be acquainted with most of them.

There was no reservation in Laubert’s speech, but the young man was laughing and smiling as if his curtness didn’t offend him.

“I’m thankful. It’s a long road ahead, but with you people I don’t think I’d be bored.”

“...Thank you for that.”

His acquaintance seemed to be a little sullen. His house was that of knight’s, which mean he was barely a nobleman. From his point of view, the young man, who could be discerned as being one from a count’s family just by looking, surely was a strong stimulus to the cold gate that was his inferiority complex.

And with those young noblemen inside, the carriage proceeded slowly through the road to Marlin.



“I heard that it’d be in the countryside, but...”

“It exceeds my expectation, as to how there’s absolutely nothing in here...”

The young man and the acquaintance sighed as they saw the scenery shown by the window.

Outside their carriage was a forest, or a meadow, or a mountain, or a field. Most of the fields only produce staple food, such as wheat. They couldn’t see any of them producing special products, such as vineyards for wine. Even if they were just fields, there were some fields that would be pleasing to the eye either because of their produce or their form, but apparently none of it could be expected here in this side of the country. Compared to the land they entered just before this place, it was hard to tell whether they were still in the same province, no, in the same country at all.

“Is this land the one that got entrusted to the viscount...?”

“Yes... normally dividing the role of government to several deputies would be a more efficient approach to rule this land... but—”

Laubert took a glance at the farmers who were plowing their fields outside the carriage’s window. Sweat was flowing down their forehead as they were working hard, but they were still singing happily and there seemed to be a cheerful atmosphere about them.

“— The faces of those farmers are unusually lively. And there’s water throughout the

farmlands. It seems that they have taken several approaches to take care of their people.”

“Oh, as expected from Laubert. What a different view of things.”

“Stop it, sir.”

He smiled as he waved his hands at the young man’s words.

“Well, it’s true that we’re in the countryside, but I think there is a room to grow. If a new industry were to develop here, it’s possible for this land to prosper even more.”

“Hmm. For example, mining?”

From the light investigation he did before he left, it seemed that copper mines once flourished in Marlin. However, most of the mountains were already abandoned then and people kept away from it as their number dwindled.

“Liquor, how about liquor! Brewery seems good to me! Walden Province used to be famed for its wine, didn’t it?”

“No, that’s not for us to decide... in the first place, it’s not decided yet whether we’d be working here or not.”

He smiled wryly at his companions. Certainly, Walden was a wine producing region. At the same time however, other regions in this province had already taken a hold of the share to cultivate them. There was very little room to cultivate them in Marlin, as its utmost utility was to produce staple crops, such as wheat.

But if one were to close their eyes to the fact that this countryside lacked entertainment— and that its lord was ill-famed back in the royal capital—, he thought it was actually not that bad of a land.

“Anyway, it’s not fair if I’m the only one talking here. Have you two noticed anything else?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it...”

“Hmm, indeed there’s something that left me rather wondering...”

The young man said so as he put on some airs.

“Up until this point, I haven’t seen any structure that resembles a fortress on the way. Even if there was, they were hardly maintained at all.”

“Ah, come to think of it, that’s true.”

‘Uh-huh’, the acquaintance nodded as well.

In order to protect the land from thieves, bandits, and monsters, development of fortresses as the base where knight’s order would be stationed in should’ve been a necessity. Especially for Marlin, as the size of the territory far exceeded its population density. There were supposed to be more bases for the knights to inspect the territory.

“In other words, I wonder if that means the size of the knight’s order here isn’t that big?”

If their number were lacking, of course the number of forts would also decrease. As the number of people to maintain and defend the fortresses would be insufficient as well, there would be the risk that they might be taken over and abused as the base of bandits or the likes. The number of the fortresses would be decreased in order to avoid such situation.

“That’s good news. I don’t have your lineage, and I can’t study like Laubert. If their knight’s order is lacking in hands, there’s a room for me to enter.”

“True, that... well, it’d be easier than being a knight in the capital...”

“I think it’d be a much busier job though?”

“Well, it’s much preferable than no job at all. It might be a petty post, but it’s still an opportunity to get myself knighted. I’ll have a go at it.”

While they talked about other things, the carriage had finally arrived at the town that served as the centre of the viscounty. It was a rustic town with a population of three or four thousand people at the very most. The town landscape was pretty much a number of houses huddled together on the centre top of a small hill like a flock of sheep surrounded by a battered wall around it. It was an awfully common small walled town that may find itself tremble from the threat of monsters or bandits.



“Gentlemen, welcome to Marlin.”

The one who welcomed the candidates as they alighted from the carriages was a small man whose voice was devoid of any intonation whatsoever. Judging from his appearance alone, he was a small-time nobleman. But his dull expression and his pale complexion made his presence absolutely unnoticeable. If they were to pass each other in the town, it was possible for them to mistake him for a commoner.

“His face looks like a doll’s, huh. Spooky.....”

The acquaintance whisperingly voiced his impression. Yes, a doll. He was so inanimate it was hard to tell whether he really was a living human being at all. Even slaves who got overworked for years wouldn’t have a face which seemed to have already worn out of emotions like this far.

The surrounding noblemen children probably held the same sentiment as well, as the gaze they casted upon the man were without any favourable light on them. But as if he were paying no mind to it, the flat voice continued.

“After having all of you gentlemen stay in this town for one night, you will be taking another examination tomorrow. After that, you will be interviewed by the lord in order to decide on the possibility of your admittance... such will be the program.”

“May I ask you a question?”

The young man promptly raised his hand.

“..... By all means.”

“I suppose that we’ll be guided to our lodging in a moment, but, I’d like to inquire about that in advance. With all due respect, this is a small town, and thus there should only be a few facilities that can host this number of adults all at once. So I’d like to know, how is your lord going to treat us considering that?”

It was a daring question. The point that could be heard from the question was, “does your lord know how to treat a noble?”. Laubert couldn’t figure out the meaning behind such question that might invite the displeasure of the lord if things were to go wrong. Considering the personality of the young man he had been speaking with along the journey so far, he couldn’t understand the reason of such conduct.

Instead of being baffled, the man replied,

“The lord has instructed us to treat you according to your families beforehand.”

“And that instruction was?”

“For those who came from a viscount house and above, while it is a bit far away, we have prepared for you a refurbished lodging place in the deputy’s manor. For those who came from a baron house, please use the lodging house in this town. As for those who came from a baronet and a knight house, we apologise for your inconvenience, but you will be staying at the house of the town’s volunteers for tonight.”

His reply was curiously still without any intonation at all, as if he were reading it aloud from a paper.

With a ‘hmm’, the young man nodded.

“...Excuse me for that. Although it might be possible that I may have offended you, recently there are a lot of people who would ignore the convention that is the hierarchy among the nobles of the kingdom. Well, I believed that the viscount isn’t one among them, though.”

So he courtly concluded the matter.

The guide gazed at everyone with his emotionally indecipherable eyes, and said,

“Then, please come this way...”

With a gloomy tune, he began to lead the candidates on their way.

The young man shrugged.

“Hmm. He’s unexpectedly shrewd.”

“You gave me the chills there... You said before, ‘let’s get accepted now’, so why did you become belligerent all of a sudden...”

“What you did was so unlike you—”

The young man waved his hands lightly at Jean’s and the acquaintance’s vigorous

argument.

“My bad, my bad. I just wanted to probe around the situation for a bit.”

His excuse was that it was just out of childish rashness of his.

But Laubert could intuitively tell that he was lying.

“...Well, now the one with the least prospect to get employed would be you, I guess.”

“Hey, hey, you’re being cruel with your remarks.”

And so he let it be bygones.

Although they had grown closer, they just casually knew each other. He felt that he might have some hidden circumstances, but he might get into trouble if he poked too deep, so he kept away from doing so.

“Still, the three of us got splendidly split apart, huh. I’ll be borrowing the townsman’s house, huh...”

“From the start, the status of our families is different so...”

“Haha. Strange, though, I don’t feel that difference at all. Hopefully, all three of us can be accepted together.”

And so the young man of the count house concluded their conversation.

It was certain that he had a secret with him, but he was a pleasant partner for intelligent exchanges.

Indeed, it would be nice if everyone could be accepted without a hitch.



The next day.

Laubert, who had spent the whole night without a wink of sleep, was taking his exam while still feeling a bit tired from the journey. The contents of the exam were not at all difficult. There were some simple math word problems as a warm-up, some liberal

arts questions on history and manners which he smoothly answered, and then a bit of general knowledge subjects such as civil and criminal law. Finally, the exam was tied up by some essay questions, and then that was it.

For Jean, who had been studying in the library on a daily basis, save for a few careless mistakes, the questions were so simple to the point that he might not lose any marks at all. Similarly, other candidates who had some sense with them would probably find it not particularly difficult as well. Conversely, however, those who spend their days idling about and passed through life just with their noble status would most likely find the questions tough.

“...It’s time. The examination is over.”

As the sound of a bell was heard from the distance, a slave dressed in maid attire heartlessly declared so. At those words, some of the examinees that still had yet to fill in the blanks made desperate faces.

“Wa, wait! I’m still on it!”

“No, the exam is over.”

“I said, ‘wait’, slave! I’m a noble, okay?! I don’t remember that lowly people like you can order me arou—!”

One examinee tried to vehemently argue with her in an unsightly way. However, the slave-maid didn’t give in.

“Yes, I’m a slave. However, you’re not my master.”

Exactly. A slave is their master’s possession. And her master was Oubeniel, the owner of the Marlin Viscounty, As long as the maid-slave was moving under the instructions of her lord, even if he was a noble’s child, the man, in his position as someone wishing to be employed as an official by the viscount, did not have the right to hinder the task entrusted to her.

But then again, had he understood that, he wouldn’t make such a fuss in the first place.

“For a mere lowly slave, you’re cheeky!”

A dry sound echoed within the test venue. The infuriated examinee had just hit the

slave.

As expected, this was crudely. Jean-Jacques Laubert reflexively covered his face. On top of having refused to submit his answer after the exam had already been over, he also resorted to an act of violence. From his attitude, apparently his house was quite a renowned one, but he caused a commotion in another house's residence, and surely no house would want to take in a bastard like him. Even if one were to accept him, he probably couldn't do enough and would just be a source of embarrassment for them. He'd end up disinherited or sent off to a monastery, accepting him would be a mess like gulping down the worst wine that somehow got mixed in.

While failing to notice such a thing, that examinee smiled triumphantly at the staggered maid.

"Listen, you... Do you know who am I?"

"Yes, I know who you are. You are examinee number 14, surname is—"

"I'm not asking that!"

And then another slap.

Jean could not bear it any longer.

"You, stop it!"

"Hey, let go! You dreg of the Lauberts! What are you doing to me!?"

He also used the same way of speech to Laubert, who was now restraining his hands. There was no saving him.

But Laubert had to finish what he had already started. For now, he had to calm him down. If he could lay down his arms and apologise here, it shouldn't end up as that serious of a matter. But that was only if he could do that.

"Please just listen up, alright? Slaves are their owner's property. If you hurt them without a care, that's just the same as smearing mud on the lord's face, okay?"

"He wouldn't mind if I punish a rude slave who does her job improperly, would he!?"

“No, if you say improperly...”

Wouldn't that remark apply more to you?

But before he could argue so, the examinee broke free from Lebert's arms, he didn't have enough strength to restrain him.

And it was then,

“Hey, what's this ruckus all about?”

A tall man that seemed to be a swordsman entered the room where the examination was held.

The examinee that raised the commotion shakingly raised his voice as well.

“Wh, what are you?!”

“...Retainer to the viscount, Due Schwarz. Until a moment ago, I was in the other venue testing candidates for the military posts.”

The man who introduced himself as the viscount's vassal said so in a rough manner of speech.

From his formal attire, apparently he was a military officer serving the viscount, but his speech and conduct, his disposition, his facial expression, no matter from where you look at him, he exuded an uncouth atmosphere about him. ‘Is he perhaps from the lower nobility, or raised from being a commoner?’, Jean surmised so.

It seemed that the problematic examinee concluded so as well, as he suddenly started to float the colour of contempt on his face.

“That so? Well great timing then. Your house's slave has greatly injured my feeling. It's necessary for you to punish her accordingly here.”

“Ah?”

“Not very bright, are you? You can't understand unless I speak it in a vulgar manner? Fine, let me put it this way, show me that you'll at least clean up that bloody slave's mess, alright?”

He said so with a look of utmost pride on his face.

The man who introduced himself as Due turned around to the slave woman that took a pratfall on the floor.

“Errrr, you’re—”

“I am Suzanne, Due-sama.”

“Right, right... that was your name huh... what happened here?”

In her emotionally cryptic voice, the slave said,

“I was attempting to collect the answer sheets as the time-indicating bell had already rung as the Master instructed me to when examinee number zero one four claimed he was ‘still on it’ and resisted.”

“...Hah. I see.”

With a revolted look, Due shifted his gaze to the other examinees that were Jean and his co.

“It’s this guy right? Just wanted to confirm it from the neutral standpoint of other examinees.”

“Uh, right.”

Laubert unintentionally nodded. His eyes were calm, but there was an enigmatic force in it that told him he wouldn’t tolerate a lie. Also, there was no gain for him even if he told him one. The other examinees followed after Jean and nodded as well.

“Well then, number zero one four. You’re disqualified. Let’s obediently go back to the capital now. If you have no travelling funds with you, I can give you an interest-free loan.”

“Wh, what! What do you mean, go back!? And what do you mean by an interest-free loan!? You mean you’re not paying me reparations, but giving me a loan!?”

“If you get it then our matter is quickly settled. Then, please leave immediately. Or perhaps—”

With a glint in his eyes, Due glared down at the examinee.

“— you can’t walk unless I lend you a hand, huh?”

If you don’t want to get beaten up, then beat it with your own legs. He was saying that.

“Kuh...! Ever since I was born, this is the first time I’m insulted like this! I, I’m leaving!”

So he said, and the problematic individual in this incident left.

Due let out a deep sigh that was full of his exasperation.

“Ever since I was born, this is the first time I’m insulted like this’, huh. He’s sure was living quite the happy life.”

“.....All examinees, we apologise for the trouble caused. I will now resume collecting your answer.”

“I’ll see myself out too, then. Examinees, if you get accepted, apparently we’ll be in each other’s care for a very long time, looking forward to working with you.”

Leaving the answer sheet collection to the slave-maid, Due made his exit.

Soon after, she finished collecting them. At the same time, some of the examinees had this ‘I did it’ face on them.

‘Ah, were they filling in the blanks during the commotion?’

Or perhaps, there was also the possibility that their cheating was even more explicit.

‘How shrewd’, Laubert lamented.

In the worst case, these guys might become his colleague instead of the guys who did the tests by themselves. ‘Will I be able to cope well with this kind of people?’, as he thought so, he could feel that he was getting depressed.

“Then, after the scoring is finished, the successful applicants shall enter into an interview with the lord. As this will take some time, lunch is already served for you in the dining hall in the meantime, so please take your time until then. That is all.”



After she said so, the maid left as well. It was as if she had already forgotten that an examinee had slapped her a while ago.

“...Quite the well-educated maid. Don’t you think?”

The young man he had just acquainted the other day talked to Lebert.

“So, the exam, how was it for you?”

“Well, all the answer columns were filled.”

‘That means no problem for me’, Laubert thought to himself. If he could do all of it, then the difficulty level was low enough for him to exceed the pass zone comfortably. Though there were a few things outside of the exam questions themselves that he couldn’t figure out got mixed in as well.

“More importantly, Jean-Jacques Laubert, what do you think of that maid?”

“Hey, hey, you’re asking that as soon as the exam’s finished? You fancy someone like that?”

As might be expected from an attending maid, even as a slave she was well-kept. However, her features were not among the best. Among their generation, she’d be the number three beauty of a random small village, and that would be the highest valuation that she could get. And he couldn’t get past that cold attitude of hers either. As a woman she would be dull, and as a slave she would come out to be a bit arrogant.

At that, the young man made a wry smile.

“Not that. Did you notice it while you were looking at her? That maid clothes is quite the magic equipment, you know?”

“What was that?”

Jean unconsciously asked him back

Magic equipment. The words referred to magically-enhanced articles crafted by a mage’s hand. It would be considerably expensive to attribute magic in normal tailoring. These weren’t that uncommon in the noble society, but it was unheard for a slave to be wearing one on them.

“I’ve heard that the viscount was an alchemy fanatic, but...”

“Perhaps, he produced them on his own and then granted to his men and slaves. Even that swordsman who showed up in this place just now, I can see that even the Royal Guard wouldn’t be entrusted with what he had as his equipment.”

“No, that’s not possible now, is it? I mean, the Royal Guard is the kingdom’s most elite. And if it was that hard for even them to get their hands on one, so how come a single military officer of a viscount could have it?”

That was impossible. After procuring such things, there was no way he could have a leeway to pay up such lavish salary like the one written on the bulletin. Just how much wealth would it take to pull that off?

“No, those property themselves didn’t come by because he was a viscount. I think it was probably handmade by the viscount himself.”

“Hang on, I couldn’t quite catch up. Handmade? He could make equipment that are superior in comparison to the ones that the most elite in the kingdom have, is that it? Well, just ‘that’s because he’s an alchemy fanatic’ wouldn’t be enough of an explanation now, would it?”

“.....Even I’m a little taken aback as well. I’ve had taken the rumours about Viscount Oubeniel with a grain of salt until I came to this place. However, today, I was convinced for the first time. The man we will be meeting soon is a maestro alchemist. To the extent that he’s probably in the entire continent’s top five.”

“I still don’t quite understand even if you say so...”

Jean said so as he shook his head. In the first place, the subject of alchemy itself had very little connection with the nobility. It was a trick of fraudsters who would straightforwardly speak of bedtime stories like turning lead into gold or achieving immortality. Even some people would hesitate from putting them in the category of magic. The subject was recognised as such. Even if he said that he was probably in the continents’ top five, he couldn’t perceive how big of a deal that was.

A mage with a certain extent of ability would be enough to create the kind of remedy or attire that the royal family uses, and if you desire more than that, that would be where the dwarven smiths come in. The merit of studying a subject like alchemy had been held in doubt in its entirety. He thought, just what kind of drunk madman would

pay attention to something like that, but...

“...The interview will be after lunch, huh. Let’s change the place for a bit. There’s something I want to talk about, just for the two of us.”

As he said so, the young man took Jean out. Their destination was an unpopular spot behind the mansion.

“So, what’s this all about? For you to need a place like this to talk.”

Naturally, his words became harsh. He was forcibly dragged there because some sort of a secret talk. It was a nuisance no matter how one looks at it.

The young man, with the preamble of ‘before that’, began to talk,

“Jean-Jacques Laubert. Did you not ever find it suspicious?”

“Find what suspicious?”

“The fact as to how Tullius Shernan Oubeniel was made as a viscount in this territory to begin with.”

It was indeed a curious turn of events. While still being wary, Laubert prompted him to continue.

“While you were looking for official jobs, you should’ve collected rumours about various noblemen. Among them, of course there should’ve been a story about the discord between the two Oubeniel brothers.”

“Certainly, there was. Long ago, it was said that the Oubeniel’s second son was a prodigy that would surpass the first son, but after his reputation fell to the ground, it was said that the younger brother’s notoriety held the older brother back. I’ve heard that kind of a story now and then.”

‘There it is’, the young man sighed.

“And that older brother, who is now the current head of the family, went and appealed to the court to grant that little brother a viscountcy, and gave him this territory. Why so, do you think?”

“Hmm, if the rumours about the discord were true... then it was to keep him away from the capital?”

“There’s that too. Although the younger brother couldn’t be charged for his slave-murdering conducts, the older brother couldn’t bear to let the young brother’s questionable research to continue in the capital. But there’s one other reason.”

Reason. As he was told so, Jean pondered about it. The reason why the older brother might give his younger brother, who was alchemy-crazed, murdering slaves with cruel methods, and a disrespectable noble, position and power.

There was one, one unpleasant guess crossed his mind.

“Wait, don’t tell me...!?”

“It’s exactly as you guessed.”

The young man bitterly affirmed.

“Set him up for misgovernance as a lord, and then use that wrongdoing in order to put his brother in blood to death.”

“That’s ridiculous...”

It was really a ridiculous narrative. Kill his own brother? And he gave him a viscountcy, just for that? On top of being too elaborate for just a small gain, even if he succeeded he wouldn’t be able to avoid unfavourable criticism for it. Before he could ask him about that, the young man added.

“Of course, staining the name of the count house of Oubeniel would be a foolish undertaking he wouldn’t be able to avoid. However, as of now the head of the house could not kill his brother. As the younger brother were still being protected under the noble society’s principles, killing his younger brother in blood for the sake of self-protection because he was being a threat to his position as the next person in the line of their succession would penalise him. But what if he were to kill him because of territory mismanagement? The narrative will change like this,”

As he said that, he began to emulate a play as he spoke with swagger.

“Alas! The lord of the count’s house hath sent down punishment even upon the

brother he shared his blood with in order to reformeth his politics! Partiality as a sibling hath blindeth him to commit an error when he hath his brother appointed, but for the count's was ashameth of it, while he kneweth he hath to vindicate his honour, he still did so in order to maketh it right!'...like that. It wouldn't change the fact that he killed his own brother, but this way the damage it would do to the house's reputation would be kept to a minimum."

"He gave him a territory... so he could pull off that cheap trick on him?"

"Even if it was out of self-love, it was such a terrible deed, right? He abused the trust His Majesty has given him to govern his lands and used it as a pretext in order to solve his sibling rivalry, on top of that he even got the court involved when he gave his brother his peerage. What a big deal of a count. Though a viscount that deals with his political affairs nonchalantly while he amuses himself with alchemy is no better than him too."

The young man did not attempt to hide his contempt as he spat out.

Laubert could see finally see what he was talking about. Of course, the young man would also tell him that he had a solution to that issue.

He talked about both of the Oubeniel brothers with disgust, and though dim, fervent loyalty towards the royal family could be seen from him. Take these two together, then it was clear as to where it all came to down to.

"That means, you... came here to secretly investigate the viscount's house. Moreover, you also grabbed the count by the tail before you did so with the viscount's. Thus your true lord is probably one of the centralists."

"I knew it, you're quick-witted. Those fellows who let you be an unemployed up until now just don't have keen eyes."

"Thanks for that... well, that talk you want to have so you brought me here was—"

"I want you to help me in my secret investigation. I don't think that this operation will go wrong, but if they were to look into me for a bit, they'd know right away that I'm connected to the centralists. You, on the other hand, have a clear personal record."

There was a selfish reason in that. After all, it would be like saying that he'd be dragged into a political strife that was so far up beyond the reach of a baron house like

Laubert's.

But at the same time, he could also understand the following things. There was no changing the fact that Viscount Oubeniel does rule Marlin. And for him, in addition to having his brother as an enemy, he also got the centralists, which was the natural enemy of the local lords, to keep a close eye on him.

That means, even if by chance he got through the interview later that afternoon and joined in as a vassal, his future would still be bleak.

"You had this high opinion that I was quick-witted, right. Then, shouldn't you know the answer already?"

"Even so, I'd still like to hear it from your own mouth."

"So you want to take my word for it... sigh."

'Can't be helped, huh', he shrugged.

"I'll do it. Considering which would be the winning plot here, there's no choice but to do it. But after we got him crushed, don't go poof on me."

"That would depend on the way we work. Not just you, me too."

And then as a proof of contract, they shook their hands.

The young man's hand was cold. But it was said that only those with cold hands could excel in politics. If the young man could acquire the intelligence that could determine the viscount's, and his older brother, the count's lives, the centralists would surely arrange a reasonable post for him. Serving under him after he got placed up there might not be so bad as well.

"By the way, what will you do about that acquaintance of yours? I think it's better to talk to him about this as well, though."

"Let's not. Spouting lies while keeping a straight face is not in his disposition. He's not suitable for a covert job like this... But he's quite stubborn, if there's something that may benefit from the strength of his sense of justice, we should be able to pick him up later."

And then it felt like the man's cold hand wasn't the only one's there. As if there was a transparent hand joining them. To fulfill a stated intention is also a thing among the relationship between nobles. Even Jean could understand such way of living.

"Hmm. Well then, let's both be careful during the interview in the afternoon later. As I said before, the viscount is an extraordinary alchemist. We don't know what kind of preparations he had made."

"Right."

They didn't quite know what kind of preparations the alchemist had made, but one can't be too careful. As a noble, the viscount stood out as someone who lacked common sense, but in the other hand, Jean heard that he was top-notch in his field. They must be careful so as not to get drawn into their opponent's field.

Laubert engraved that in his mind.

.....But all that was for naught.

# Chapter 13

## Gleaning <Second Half>

“Good afternoon. I am Tullius Shernan Oubeniel.”

In a certain office that was the interview venue. The impression of the person—Tullius Shernan Oubeniel—who was expecting Jean there was more mediocre than Jean initially thought.

He was several years younger than Laubert. Probably he was not twenty yet. All his facial features were in order, but, perhaps it would be easier to understand if one were to say that there were no ugly aspects there instead of the other way? Like a bland bisque doll, such was the only impression his cold face left on him.

If there were indeed a beautiful aspect in his look, then the maid who was attending beside him would be far more superior in that matter. Her face looked like that of a doll's as well, but it was more like a sculpture carved by a chisel which a master artisan put all his soul into, her mould had that feeling of exquisiteness. This maid was also fitted with a silver collar, the proof of slavery.

But the most curious presence there was the person standing on the other side of the maid and the viscount. The person was dressed in a thick robe, their face hidden by its hood. From the protrusions on the person's chest, Laubert thought that the person might be a woman, though for what purpose did this person who wasn't showing their face to be there waiting besides the noble as well?

While burying such question, for the time being Laubert lowered his head.

“It's an honour to be in your presence, Lord Viscount. I am examinee number twenty, Jean-Jacques—”

“Ah, wait, wait! You don't have to introduce yourself. I can see the number in your name tag and with that I can look your name up in the document I have here. At any rate, since we have a lot of people at this time, I have to save time here.”

And so, he was interrupted by the viscount.



How outrageous. To a nobleman, their name is like a face, or like their tools of trade. It must be treated with due respect. He regarded it not in the slightest, and in addition he spewed that it was because he didn't have the time for it!

As he thought, as a nobleman his lacking points were conspicuous. Taking up on the young man's offer was the correct choice. So Laubert thought as he glanced at the young man who was summoned to the room as well. He also had this somehow astounded face.

There were six candidates, including himself, currently in the room. They were all sitting on chairs that were lined up in a row. There was a considerable gap between their position and the viscount's desk, about three metres. It was indeed wide, but that was a reasonable distance in a landed noble's office.

"Well, shall we get over with this quickly? Stand up."

""Yes.""

"Three steps forward."

""...Yes?""

"You didn't hear that? Take three steps forward."

It was a strange instruction. 'What is his intention?' Laubert thought as he couldn't surmise anything from it. Did he want to see the way they walk? Or perhaps their conduct? If that was the case, then it was Laubert himself who was wondering whether this viscount could understand proper conduct or not.

Nonetheless, the highest-ranked person in the room was the young viscount. Thus confused as they were, all of the candidates took three steps.

Viscount Oubeniel let out a smile filled with satisfaction.

"Right, thank you. Well then, don't move... Do it, Uni."

"Yes—- 'Earthbound'"

Heavy pressure.

With that all six of them were floored at once.

“Wh-!?”

“Th, this is!”

“What is the meaning of this!?”

It felt like being held down by a giant palm of hand from above.

...Heavy. His whole body was heavy, and he couldn't stand.

Something was crushing his body down, for someone powerless like Laubert it was something unbearable, not even for a short while. He couldn't move a muscle, and he couldn't understand what was happening as he fell into a state of confusion.

“Im, impossible... this can't be!”

He heard the young man painfully cried.

At that, the viscount went, ‘good grief’ as he shook his head.

“If you're like that, as I thought, did you bring a protective amulet with you, I wonder? Because if you have one, it'll be difficult for the brainwashing magic to take into effect. I struck ahead and I have prevented you from stirring about, so I'll be taking that away.”

“What... did you say...?”

While still being nailed to the floor, he could somehow still say that much.

‘Does that mean he had expected that someone among the candidates were trying to set him up from the very beginning?’

All the more bewildered as he was, the young man said,

“Th, then... just what is, this magic...? To think... the amulet... didn't, react...!”

“Yes, about that, you're probably wondering. You're the second person who asked me that. The other one asked me a while ago too.”

Viscount Oubeniel let out a stifled chuckle.

“Well then, I’ll explain it with a simple lecture. Take the fire magic as an example. “Fireball”, a spell used by those with low magical power. If you try to stop the spell from hitting you using that amulet, what would happen? Of course, before it hits you, the amulet will trigger a barrier and the spell will be rebuffed. However—-“

The viscount snapped his finger as he said so. Immediately after that, the chair where the young man just sat a while ago burned—- no, it exploded. That was a chantless fire magic. All of a sudden the heat wave generated from his back started to attack the young man. Of course, its force was averted by the amulet.

“Ugh!”

A piece of the chair debris that was broken by the spell hit his forehead.

“— In this case, the amulet could not defend you from things that were moved by magic... Ah, I’m sorry. Did it hurt? I’ll patch you up now so you’ll forgive me for that.”

He snapped his fingers again, and the wounds on the young man’s forehead quickly faded away. But the pressure that restrained him was still there.

“So offensive magic can’t pass through the barrier, but recovery magic can, how odd... Anyway, let us return to the original topic. So, the “earthbound” spell isn’t like those spheres of fires that were conjured by “fireball” spell, as it wasn’t meant to restrain you directly. It only used the gravitational force— which is keeping you on the ground—- that was there in the first place, and doubled it. Thus, you won’t be able to avert it by using a simple magical tool, because the force exists already, and it already affects you, and we’re just strengthening that force with magic... you understand now?”

‘...Of course the answer would be no. Grevitesienal force? What is that, some sort of terminology in alchemy? Just who would understand that load of nonsense?’ Others looked similar as well. There were either the colour of confusion or hatred in their eyes, but none had the light of comprehension in them.

But one thing could be understood. This mad alchemist certainly had a malicious agenda.

“Now, Uni. Disarm these men.”

“As you ordered, Master... Excuse me.”

After she received her master’s order, the slave-maid who casted the spell approached the men. She patted them down and confiscated their magical armaments.

“Then!... Gah!?”

The young man, who was trying to do something, was overpowered by the maid at a speed unperceivable to the eyes.

“...It seems he was going to make the amulet self-destruct.”

“I see. So if he were to return alive but with his amulet destroyed, it’d mean to his superior that he received some sort of ‘treatment’ here. Did he manage to do so?”

“No. It’s safe.”

As she said so, she retrieved an amulet that was fashioned as a rosario from his chest.

“Well, even if he managed to do that, I’ll just simply repair it. But since you saved me the labour and resource for doing so, this is better. Well done, Uni.”

“It’s an honour to receive your praise.”

Then, the maid bowed reverently.

It was unbelievable. From what Jean saw, this unknown pressure was occurring in a scope that enveloped all six of them. Its effect should’ve been indiscriminate, as there was clear indentation on the surrounding carpet. But still, the maid moved around without difficulty, and quickly confiscated their magical equipment.

“Oh, there’s a communication device here.”

“Hah! How foolish... did you think... I wasn’t... that prepared...!?”

One of the candidates who wasn’t well-acquainted with Jean proudly said so while still gasping from the pressure.

“I’ve heard of... your crooked dealings... from the count...! The conversation in this room... is already...”

“Ah, it’s already been interfered with.”

Oubeniel casually declared so.

“..... Huh?”

“Where do you think you are? You’re in my stronghold, you know? Soundproof to jam communications, impact disabler, teleportation magic barricade, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Of course we are prepared at least to that degree.”

While saying so, he toyed around with the communication device in his hands,

“...Hmm. This size, the minimal amount of material, I suppose this device’s effective communication distance is limited only within the mansion’s premises. I suppose you have a friend among the other candidates too? Surely they began to move as soon as the communication was cut off, but I’ve stationed Due there. There are not many people who can get away from him, not even top-notch adventurers. Too bad, huh. Though, you do have a good perception.”

—- If they were to reach the capital— or even if they didn’t, assuming there were other collaborators in their vicinity— it would’ve been dangerous.

He concluded his evaluation as so. Although, he thought that such a scheme couldn’t be done in the first place. Laubert didn’t know much about the variety of magical tools, but at least he knew that one would need a large-sized device had they wanted to communicate long-distance. It was impossible to bring such a thing without being seen.

Even so, the examinee changed completely as colour was drained from his face.

“You, you’re bluffing... there’s... just no way...”

“It’s not like I’m asking you to believe me. There’s no inconvenience for me even if you don’t... Well then, Drei. I’ve kept you waiting, huh. Time to do your job.”

“Yes, master.”

With a short reply, the woman who was standing beside the viscount took off her robe.

From what was exposed, there were long silver hair, brown skin, unworldly beautiful

face—— and a pointed long ear.

Within Jean's knowledge, there was only one kind that met all such characteristics.

“Da, dark elf...!?”

Someone among the examinees raised their voice in surprise.

Dark elves, known with their other name, dark fairies. For its ties with demons, They were officially recognised as an enemy of mankind by the church, all citizens had been notified to neutralise them, dead or alive, if they were to run into one. Barely a single one of them were living in the areas inhabited by humans, as all of them had fallen into slavery, a damned race they were.

However, it was said that their magical latency and the prowess of their arts were not inferior to the forest elves.

“You have this... kind of thing... too...?!”

In addition to the maid who casted the restraining magic without a chant, a literally inhuman magus— a dark elf, appeared as well.

As Jean and his fellows were squirming in despair, the woman named Drei let out a dark laugh.

“Kuhuhuhu... I find it troubling if you were to mistake this body with the lot of my former brethren...”

As she said so, she put her hand on the eyepatch covering the upper left portion of her face.

Eyepatch. Yes, she was hiding her left eye.

Why did she hide it? And why was she going to reveal it now?

And as he saw her unblemished face after the black eyepatch was removed, he knew the answer to those questions right away.

Clearly, the violet-coloured iris on her left eye differed in colour from her right eye. There was a dangerous magical power swirling in there, it was enough for Jean who

wasn't even a magus to perceive so.

“De, demon eye.....!?”

It was mentioned in an illustrated book he had read once in the library to kill time. Gorgon, Catoblepas, Basilisk, Gazer... It was said that the devilish eye, which a lot of dangerous monsters inherently possess, could inflict a spell to others just with an eye contact.

*TL Note: If you're not familiar with the name “gazer”, it's the Japanese equivalent to the D&D monster, “beholder”. Credit to sancturillore for bringing it up.*

The woman named Drei snorted.

“Hmm. Even among the lowly apes, it seems that there's someone who knows a bit too, huh? Indeed, this eye is a demon eye bestowed to me by our master. The extent of its effect—I shall let your body experience it for yourself.”

‘I can't’, but there was no time to think so.

Even when Jean knew that it was indeed a demon eye, its effect was getting into him just by seeing it.

For Jean, who only had the magical capacity of an ordinary person, there was no avenue for him to resist.

“Ah... gah!?”

His consciousness was dyed in the violet colour.

His thoughts were diluted and his reason was melting, as if he were getting drunk from a bad alcohol.

Meanwhile, Tullius Oubeniel smiled in satisfaction.

“In the past, Uni picked up the body of a young Gazer in the dungeon. I preserved it and later, I transplanted its eye to her. There's a lot of subspecies of the demon called Gazer, and the effect of their demon eyes is also vastly different.”

“Ah... u.....”

“Igh... geh...”

‘My head is fuzzy’.

‘Every voice is distant’.

‘What is this place?’

‘Who am I?’

“So, what I transplanted in Drei was a kind that’s specialised in brainwashing. Apparently they get their food by manipulating the other party to hunt it for them. There are sure some strange creatures in this world, right?”

“No matter how many times I see it, I still find its immediate effect to be wonderful. As long as she’s here, we won’t need the brainwashing incense anymore.”

“No, it’s hasty to conclude so, Uni. While rare, warriors who can fight off the eye’s effect do exist, and in the other hand, no men can keep themselves from breathing. Besides, the effect of the demon eye is limited to things within Drei’s line of sight. The incense would be better if we wanted to brainwash even more people at once.”

‘I can hear a voice eloquently explaining something’

‘So?’

‘So what should I do?’

“Please, someone, quickly, quickly tell me’

‘Otherwise, my thoughts will go insane.’

“In addition to that, in exchange of its high power and immediate effect, it eats away her magical power to a ridiculous extent, hence the eyepatch acts as a seal. When its power gets too strong, cases like the self-destructing amulet that almost occurred earlier may happen as well. My point here is, put the right person in the right place.”

“Indeed, I feel a little fatigued. But it’ll be enough to deal with everyone.”

“Right. There’s the factor of Drei’s body too. Let’s do this quickly then. Uni, you may



release their restraint.”

“Yes, immediately.”

As he said so, Viscount Oubeniel stooped low in front of Jean and the other men. The pressure that nailed them on the ground had already disappeared.

‘—- Instruction, please give me instruction, quickly.’

Jean’s thoughts were stained in one colour only. Something like escaping didn’t even cross his mind.

“Alright then, first of all... Among you, who cheated during the exam? —- this includes, stealing other people’s answers, and bringing unauthorised note into the exam venue.”

““ .....””

Everyone shook their head. Of course, Jean too denied it without delay.

His mood was superb. To have everything to be dominated by others, what a wonderfully comfortable feeling.

“Next, is there anyone among you who dishonestly filled out the papers even after the test was declared to be over?”

“ .....”

“ .....”

“.....Me.”

One person raised his hands as he said so with a small voice.

“Examinee number twenty five, disqualified.”

Viscount Oubeniel crossed out one of the documents with a feather pen.

“Well then, let’s move on to individual questions. Examinee number twenty three.”

“Yes...”

The man answered back as his number was called.

“Who are you?”

“...Victor Delacroix Lavallée. Youngest son of the Marquis Lavallée’s house.”

‘That’s strange’, Jean’s consciousness declared so in suspicion.

He, he himself, should’ve identified himself as being the youngest son of a Count house.

“In my document here, you’re from a Count house, and your family name is different, though?”

“It was a lie... to keep my cover intact...”

“Who is this Marquis Lavallée to you?”

“My father...”

“Riiight... I haven’t met with Marquis Lavallée in person, but isn’t he supposedly quite aged?”

“From what I heard from my mother, my father sired me when he was fifty two...”

“Ah, I see. By now I probably can figure it out.”

As he said so, Viscount Oubeniel scratched his cheeks.

“Were you possibly put out for adoption? And the house that adopted you is the Count house written here, correct?”

“...No... I am... one of the proud Marquis house’s...”

“Was your mother a concubine?”

“No... my mother was betrayed... my father went over to his second wife...”

“And still she was passed to the Count house while she was still harbouring you. Though on her way there, you were born.”

“..... Yes.”

“Does Marquis Lavallée acknowledge you as his own son?”

“...He does not... even though... I have the same birthmark... as him... on my back...”

“Why do you insist that you’re one of the Marquis’ house? They betrayed your mother and cast her away, right?”

“My talents... will stagnate... in a pathetic Count’s house... like passing a woman over... in addition... my mother’s honour... my mother... didn’t have a place... even in the Count’s house...”

“That was why you participated in the plot to set me up. If you were to succeed, you’ll be appointed to an appropriate position for you, and your mother’s honour will be restored too. Did the Marquis say so?”

“...Yes.”

‘I see’, Oubeniel said so as he shrugged.

As his thoughts were still paralysed, Laubert couldn’t figure out the meaning of that question and answer session.

“That Marquis Lavallée person played quite the vulgar hand here. If Victor were to grab a hold of my weakness, then all’s good. If the covert operation were deemed to be exposed, he could accuse me of killing his estranged son. So no matter what the outcome was, I would still be driven into a corner, right? Crap, I just got a troublesome opponent to keep tabs on me. To drag the marquis into this is a blunder, huh...”

“But we still learned something good, Master. It was a blunder, but there’s enough room to recover.”

“Oh well. This time it was due to my blind adherence to the theory that stated that the enemy of an enemy is an ally. I’ll be sure to make the best out of this contemplation from now on.”

“Besides, the marquis also made some mistakes. First that he underestimated master’s skill. And while this one was disposable to him, he just relinquished his son from right under his nose.”

“Let’s work on that later. For now, I have to go through this quick interrogation and administer provisional treatment on them.”

Laubert still couldn’t think of anything. While remaining under the influence of the demon eye, he kept his silence as he waited for an instruction.

“Then, you’re next. What is your name?”

“.....Jean-Jacques Laubert”



“———Oi, Laubert! Jean-Jacques Laubert!”

“Yes!?”

As his acquaintance struck his shoulder, he came back to his senses.

He looked around his surroundings, then he realised he was in a hallway of the lord’s manor.

It seemed that the audience was over before he realised it.

“Why did you space out?... Hahaa, were you that tense?”

That laughing face of his acquaintance, he sure was carefree. Laubert sighed.

“It’s an interview that will determine my life from now on, alright? There’s just something wrong with people who aren’t nervous when it comes to this.”

“Don’t say that, it’s not like I’m relaxed... I didn’t score that well in the military officer exam... So it’ll all depend on the next interview.”

“Ah, is that so...”

Finally, he realised that his acquaintance was sweating a lot. In other words, if he didn’t tease Laubert here, it’d mean that he was driven into an unprecedented extent of mental strain.

“Yes, that is so. And for that reason, I’d like to take a peek into some of your responses,

because you finished the interview earlier than me.”

“Even if you say so...”

To tell the truth, what he said in the interview was all vague.

It was a hazy memory, and no matter what he did he couldn’t grasp it for certain.

At that hesitation, his acquaintance thought,

“Ah, is that so... So you didn’t respond well too, huh?”

That kind of oddly grave thought.

Now that he said that, Laubert felt that perhaps he didn’t do well at all.

“Might be so... For some reason my mind went blank, and I can’t recall what I said...”

“Hey, Laubert, don’t put that face like you’re going to vanish somewhere now... Ah, that’s right! Let’s sneak out from the inn tonight, and have some drink in the town’s bar! Yes, it’s a gloomy countryside, but there should be a place where we can get a drink.”

Perhaps because his face was so grievous, his acquaintance did so to encourage him.

“I also called that Victor guy out, but he said he was feeling ill so he passed on that.”

“Victor...”

It was the young man whom he got acquainted with in the carriage.

He felt like he made an important promise with him... but he couldn’t remember that too.

“Well, let’s just go to our customary self-pity party, just you and me. There were so many applicants, and the viscount paid for traveling and lodging expenses. There sure were a substantial amount of applications. It’s impossible for people who have been unemployed for ten thousand years like us to be accepted. Yes.”

He wondered what the acquaintance picked up from his remarks, so that he was now

saying all these sorts of encouragement in particular.

Laubert did have a problem with his acquaintance's pessimistic response, but going out for a drink might be a good idea. Regardless of the results, he felt like he couldn't help but to drink.

("Tonight, be sure—")

'But isn't something already scheduled for tonight...?'

("— to come to my place to receive your surgery")

.....

That's right. In any case, he couldn't go for a drink tonight.

"...Sorry, to make merry before the result comes out is a bit..."

"Tch, what is that? How cold."

"Hahaha. Don't sulk like that. As I said, I'm not confident whether I did well in the interview, so if I was right on the line between being accepted and rejected, my behaviour tonight might be the determining factor. At least that's what I think."

'That's right'

'So I can't see anyone tonight.'

'And when the time comes—- what to do?'

"Well, there's that way of thinking too, huh. I guess I should keep my behaviour in check too."

"Yeah, do that. Surely, you'll do well that way."

He cut off the thoughts that he couldn't put into words, and then he spouted an unfounded encouragement.

Laubert's self-awareness was there, but he couldn't find anything else to say but that.

At that time, the doors of the office used for the interviews were opened. From it, examinees were coming out, their faces were pale.

“.....Next batch, please come in.”

The collared maid invited the next round of people to enter.

“Errrrr, next batch’s examinee numbers will be—- that’s our number. Still, why do you look so scared? Is it because of that rumoured viscount? Those guys who just went out now, you guys too, all of you had the face of a dead man.”

“Yeah, that’s right...”

Laubert nodded.

...Viscount Oubeniel was dreadful. All his memories about the interview were hazy, but at least he felt that such was certain.

Even as he held on to his vague fear, for some reason he legs wasn’t moving to take him to his escape. And so, Jean-Jacques Laubert silently watched his acquaintance as the door swallowed him in.

# Chapter 14

## The Fourth Misfit

“Alright, I’m done with today’s job... Ah, having so little to approve sure feels wonderful.”

As I throw the checked and signed documents on the desk, I, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel, stretch my arms widely.

Light drops of snow flicker outside the window. It’s the beginning of winter.

Seeing as Marlin lies in the inner part of the land, and as the territory has a lot of mountains, winter is tough here. That is what I heard, and I am indeed actually sensing it from the cold drafts in this manor. Let alone petrol or gas, in the Ithuselah continent, where coal hasn’t been put into practical use, the coldness of its winter is a subject of fear by itself. There are cases of people freezing to death just like every other year, and there’s even fear of annihilation among the poorer villages. While these are rare occurrences in the areas near the coast, Marlin is an inland, mountainous area, and thus it’s like being in a direct collision course with General Frost. Of course, I’ve been spending a large portion of the budget to tackle this issue. Though it would be difficult to reduce the number of casualties to zero, at least it would be much better for the people, compared to the years when those three deputies were running the territory chaotically.

“Still, I’m glad that we could employ the new vassals in time. Had we been just a little bit late, we would have been forced to think about winter countermeasures for the people all by ourselves...”

As the thought comes into mind, the chill from the cold temperature creeps even further down my spine.

That older brother of mine would surely attribute any minor faults to my territory management skills, if the number of people that got frozen to death were terribly large. Of course it would be difficult to declass me based on that one fault only, but my stress seems to be piling up just by imagining it.

“Yes, Master. Their work has been truly remarkable.”



So she said, as she added 'here you are, master' and passed me a steaming cup of tea.

I lightly made a gesture to thank her, and let the tea's steam moisten my lips. It sure is troubling that the air is so dry during winter.

"Really, though. Tax collection, bookkeeping, construction, management of people's petitions... they do handle those matters well."

Laubert and Victor Delacroix Lorge – the self-proclaimed Lavallée – were especially among the most excellent finds. On one hand I have a well-knowing man who, despite of having led an adverse life of being an unemployed, didn't neglect to improve himself. On the other hand I have an ambitious man who is eager to have his talents acknowledged, driven by the thoughts of his late mother. Although both of them are lacking in experience, their skills as internal administrators far surpass the likes of me.

Had they been not around, the most part of the increased crop yield that I birthed with great pains would just sit there to rot, as I couldn't do tax collection satisfactorily, and it would be one hell of a mess.

Apart from the new industry formation, they've also been more or less carrying out great deals of the potion business as well.

Territory management is truly a difficult thing. Compared to the personal business I've undertaken in the capital, it is as if the attitude of the merchants here are completely different, so I'm done with them. As expected, if one wants mochi, then to the mochi store they should go. While I do my job properly as a noble, there is a limit as to how much a person can handle by themselves. Since I have augmented their brain so that they can absolutely never betray me, let me work them some more.

As for me, I'll devote myself to my research.

"Well then. Shall we head over to our primary job, shall we?"

"Yes. The arrangements have already been made."

Like always, with Uni accompanying me, I head to the lab while holding the teacup and saucer.

On my way there, a passing officer gave me a slap on the wrist, "Your manners are bad"

he said, but that's actually the charm here. I'll pull myself together outside, so give me a break now.

"Say, I'm just thinking, Uni."

"Yes."

"I feel that this residence is steadily getting more cramped."

"Well, this manor is only designed to be a temporary residence in the first place..."

That's what it is.

Even now that it has come to this, the residence of the Lord of Marlin – my residence -, has yet to be completed.

And by this I mean, I have reorganised my vassals and I have finished my tax collection job, but even now that winter is coming, I still have yet to establish my own territory at present.

"Your vassals have also requested to commence the construction of the principal residence ahead of time as well. After all, it's a public project to maintain your appearance."

"Well, seeing as it will be a residence for the viscount to dwell in. As such, I suppose it'll be quite the large mansion."

So I said, as if I was commenting about other people's affairs.

It's just that I can't quite imagine myself to live in an excessively spacious mansion. Indeed, before I expanded the amount of my vassals, this temporary residence was satisfactory enough for me. Compared to my extravagant expenditure for Due and Co., I sure am stingy in some strange places, what a laughing material.

However, even if I maintain my queer selfishness, it is currently reaching its limit. Currently, my busy vassals are constantly coming and going through the corridors of this manor. Residences of nobles in this era have dual purposes as both the lord's official residence and the government office. In my case, there's an alchemy lab in

addition to that. As this mansion is designated only for a baronet at most, of course it'll quickly cause problems.

Once the snow melts, we should start the construction of the new residence immediately.

"But still, a public project, huh... we sure have come up with quite the advanced plan."

I found myself impressed yet again as I said so. In order to solicit able workers, the feudal lord offers a suitable wage in exchange for the levied manual labour. In this continent where feudalism goes unchallenged, it is an eye-catchingly advanced preposition.

I don't know how it goes in the other places, but the noblemen in this country, extravagant as they are, pay their subordinates poorly. They would put the commoners to work in order to construct their residences, and they would settle it with the words "serving the nobility is the people's duty." Explicitly-stated, institutionalised systems of compulsory service also exists as well. In the case of farmers, the system would have their annual land tax reduced in exchange for their participation in large-scaled constructions. But as I see it, I don't think that systems of that kind would work properly.

After all, on top of the fact that the farmers would be forced to engage in the construction jobs, which would be outside their skillset, the noble's side would work them really hard in order to get the original amount's worth of the land tax that would be reduced in exchange for their compulsory service, and as a result, accidents are a frequent occurrence. If the project would be a big one, like building the new lord's manor, deaths in the double-digits would be prepared for. Also, since their jobs would be excessively rigorous, there are cases where they would simply turn the spades and picks for the construction into weapons and start a riot there. Even though the facts that the farmers have their tax reduced and the nobles get a lot of workers don't change, it is possible for the fields to be ruined as a result, ending up as a deficit for both the nobles and the farmers.

'Eh? Then why don't you use slaves?', you might ask. Well, for me who have twenty magic-users among my slaves, it might seem that I won't hesitate to do so here. However, I'm an exception. Since slaves are basically those who fail to establish

themselves in the society, only a few of them would have exceptional abilities.

The reason why my slaves are so competent in terms of magic is because I re-used Uni's data when I tampered their brain tissues – there's no chance for talented slaves to be sold so easily. If they had construction skills only, that alone would be a reasonable selling point. The slave merchant would evoke a high price when they sold them, as one can't always buy them because of them being the rare existence that they are. And even if one were to send cheap, more-or-less mediocre slaves, their incompetence disregarded, to the construction site, what they would get would be the result of a job of amateurs who were insufficiently trained, and it would be worse from what they would get from the farmers' compulsory service.

Rather, let me put it this way, farmers have a considerably better aptitude when it comes to keeping farms, or undertaking cooperative work. The number of deaths due to accidents will increase further as the construction progresses, rendering them a no longer usable force, and to add to the injury, one cannot buy another farmer to replenish the workforce.

And that is why, most nobles would only occasionally utilise the compulsory service system for provisional construction works. Of course, in cases where they would need to keep long-term labourers, like in mines or the odd fruit plantation, slaves would be worked to the bone instead.

I digressed. Well, in this country where this system is the common practice, the concept of "public project" is unheard of. While Uni said the words herself back then, she still seems to be wondering about it.

"I am afraid that I'm not quite familiar with the concept. Why don't we use magic and quickly finish the job instead?"

"Yes, there's that too..."

So I said as I ponder, lowering my pace. I do very, very, much want to eliminate Uni's doubts here, but unfortunately alchemy is my only expertise. Politics, especially internal affairs, are hardly my concern at all. So I don't think I can explain it well.

"Hmm, let's see. This is just my interpretation, but –"

For now I'll try to explain it. We're killing time as we walk anyway, and it will be a waste to try to explain it seriously. If I'm wrong here, a kind soul will correct me. Like Laubert, or Victor.

“– I don't think they're aiming to mobilise the people of the territory with the expectations that they will make the construction works prosper. I think that they are giving money away to the people, in the form of construction wages.”

“They are giving money away?”

“Yes. After all, Marlin is in the countryside, and the tax rate has been terribly rough on the people until this year. Of course, that means that the people's purses would be filled with not a single cent. There are no special products here, so there's nothing worth buying or selling. You would think that there is no way that this is a territory where the merchants would be interested to operate in, yes?

Nope, nope, all sorts of no. Merchants who come here either don't have a market share in any other places, or they're just really whimsical, and if that isn't the case, then they might be among the ones who colluded with the former deputies.

“However, the situation changed this year.”

“Indeed, we changed it, didn't we.”

We issued a declaration of tax reduction, we treated the fields with alchemy, and we also brought the new business that is the medicinal herb cultivation industry. The merchant traffic should be a lot more active than ever compared to the previous state.

“And with those changes, the people of Marlin will soon be swept into it as well. Think about it, when the merchants come, they'll bring with them the products that the people might want. And when that happens, what do you think would happen if they didn't have enough money in their hands? Do you think they'll just swallow their tears and give up?”

As I asked, Uni thought about it for a little bit,

“No, I suppose not.”

She decisively answered. ‘I thought so as well’, I remarked to return her affirmation.

If we're talking about this very moment, then of course the people of Marlin are grateful to me. The misgovernment of the deputies was reformed, and their lands, and the irrigation, were restored. They have been saved from the hell they've been living in up until recently. And of course they'd be content with my rule. For now.

However, human beings are greedy creatures, there is no way that the masses are sheep that would be satisfied with eating grass alone. As these people have led a life below the standard of living, they will be satisfied with living on that standard line for the time being. Given time, however, they will grow weary of it and start to demand other things. In the old Rome, the words "bread and circuses" were a representation of the masses' demand. However, they were in fact truthful to the teaching that "human can't live on bread alone", and they got tired of the circuses when they kept showing the same thing. In reality, unsatisfied with only bread as they were, they stuffed their stomachs with rare delicacies until they vomited (a peculiar thing), and they didn't find acrobatics enough either, as they made the gladiators fight in the colosseum.

Well, I'm the only person in this world who knows about that history, so let's leave it at that. So in short, once the people have a stable life, then they will search for amusement. And providing them with that amusement while keeping that standard of keeping would cost a lot of money.

When that time comes, if they don't have enough money when they want to satisfy those desires, what would the people think?

In most cases they would express their discontent. 'It's the government's fault'; they would say.

"And that is why they gave the people the opportunity to earn money so they could buy things, Since if we would hand out the money for free, the people would grow to make light of us, and the other nobles would look at me with suspicion. The merchants would never trust people who throw their money around as if they were joking."

'If one is lenient with other people, then they will be liked in return', is a self-serving thought. In most cases, people who do so would not be branded as a 'good people', but as 'convenient people' instead. If one gives money without something in exchange, it will spoil most people. Since they can eat without having to work, their desire to work will be dampened and their motivation will be eliminated. And when they have spent all of it, they will demand for more money, and if they don't get it, they will

complain. Like spoiled children, they will throw tantrums as soon as one stops indulging them.

In addition, at that time, even people who didn't get their share of leniency would start to distrust that lenient person too. It goes without saying that even nobles want money as well. And if one peer of theirs was to start giving out money unconditionally to people with lower status than them, it would be very unlikely for this peer to be seen favourably.

Furthermore, in no way can people trust a person who treats their valuables slovenly. Merchants will never bare their hearts to people with a poor sense of spending money. The merchants would try to open these people's purses as much as they could, but that would be about it. They would never trust these people in their dealings – they would sell as much as they could sell, and then they would say 'goodbye'. There is no hope to establish a long-term relationship with them that way.

"And that is why, at a glance this public project is a roundabout way to do distribute money. This way, it will appear as if we were compensating the people for their labour. It is consistent with the concept of the carrot and the stick. While preserving the authority and face of the lord, and without recklessly dampening the people's motivation, it is a means to distribute money to necessary spots. In addition, various orders related to the project will be the honey that would again lure the merchants to return."

After I explained it like so, she nodded in comprehension.

"I finally understand. As expected from Master."

"No, well, in the end it was just my interpretation. I could be wrong here, so if you want to know the exact answer, you can ask Laubert later."

I attached an acute precaution to my words. What I had said a while back was outside my original expertise. Even though I am a lord, my principal occupation is an alchemist, and my true wish is to realise immortality. I don't have the motivation to think about home affairs, and that is why I arranged for myself a brainwashed rank of vassals. If she wants a lecture about the pros and cons of public projects, then I suppose she should ask an expert in that field.

As I thought along those lines, she let out a light sigh.

“But still... dealing with politics sure is troublesome. Would it not be better to perform the surgery to all of the citizens?”

“.....Ahahahahah!”

I spontaneously raised my voice and laughed. While her words was a subtle sign of her disinterest, apparently Uni has a sense of humour as well.

“Don’t say unreasonable things now. Surgery isn’t free, and it takes time too. As I thought, performing them on the whole of Marlin is just impossible.”

“Is that so... Please pardon me for my foolish remarks.”

And she apologised with that serious face of hers, so I couldn’t make this any more interesting. Seriously though, she already knew that it was impossible from the start.

Thanks to that, I had no choice but to fervently stifle my laughter until we reached the lab.



I’m in my lab, which I’ve grown completely accustomed to, as I’ve been here for months after I took the position as a viscount.

But, during when I ‘employed’ the vassals a while back, its capacity was about to burst, and it did trouble the mass-produced slaves a great deal. The lab is the basement of a tiny manor that is smaller than what I had in the main residence of the Oubeniel House in the capital. It has supported my research well until now, but the time to part with it is surely drawing near.

Before anything else, I have to augment and readjust Opus=04.

“O, O, Oubeniel... are my augmentations... not over yet?”

Restrained on the lab’s operating table, is a half-naked young man.

That’s right. I didn’t leave most of my political affairs to my vassals in order to merely spend my time in idle amusement. I have been conducting experiments to gather necessary data to create this Opus-04... I’ve been through multiple trial and errors for my next “masterpiece”.



“Well, please calm down, Charl. The augmentations that will be applied to you are on a larger scale than ever before. It will take some time.”

I spoke with a gentle tone to calm Opus 04 – Charl Franz Schmidt, whose emotions were unstable.

“Ha, hahahaha... I, I’m looking forward to it... Since your experiments have always yielded wonderful results... Surely, I, too, will turn out to be a gre, gre, gre, great ‘masterpiece’...”

And so Charl spoke to me with an intimate tone.

There may be people who are able to discern from our situation what it looks like, but just to make it clear, he is an old acquaintance of mine.

Charl Franz Schmidt. He was a fellow student before I was incited into the duel that got me kicked out of the magic academy in St Gallen’s capital, Gallerien,

That being said, Charl and I enrolled in different departments. As you know, I was in the Alchemy Department. He was from the Necromancy Department, which specialises in Death Magic.

Death Magic. It’s a subject that is as minor as alchemy, and at the same time, a subject people look down upon even more than alchemy. No, perhaps it would be more accurate if I say that it was more hated instead. It is the magic to manipulate the spirits of the dead. After all, because what it does is impure and blasphemous against the dead, a dark image follows it. In fact, fundamentalist elements in the church have recommended that the subject should be immediately branded as heresy and have it eradicated, among other types of stirring around.

But, even when the faculty is currently failing its quota, just like every other year, the subject remains to be offered in the magic academy, scraping along and holding on to its thread of life as it is.

Why, one might ask. Because it’s a useful subject, that’s why.

As you might know, in this Ithuselah Continent, aside from humans and demi-humans, monsters exist here as well. And of course, among them exist the fantasy genre staple, the undead. Zombies and ghouls, skeletons and ghosts, and on top of that, liches and vampires... These eyes of mine have caught their existence several times, and some of

them have been made into materials and are now placed in the cabinet of this lab. Necromancers are the experts when it comes to these undead.

As expected, the best kinds of opponents to handle them are the priests with their holy magic, but most of them are needed as healers to treat the people instead, and there are not many combat exorcists around. The Empire of Omnia, which possesses the orders of the Holy Knights and the Warrior Monks is an exception, but there is always a shortage of them in other countries. And so, by the process of elimination, the necromancers, as the superiors in regard of the undead, are useful as a countermeasure against this shortage. As the necromancers are intruding in the niche industry that should have been their field of expertise, the church doesn't find them amusing, but if they were to eliminate them completely, then they would get themselves overworked. Therefore, the ones that are making noises in the sidelines are only a small group of fundamentalists. The more upright priests, meanwhile, are giving them their half-hearted tacit approval.

Of course, the value of their ability – communicating with the dead – is not low. Since the printing technology is underdeveloped in this world, duplication of documents is also inefficient – when an original document is lost, the valuable technologies and information written on it would also be immediately lost. When that happens, a necromancer may communicate with the spirit of the past, which makes it possible to restore the lost information.

However, this too, isn't an universal case. After death, there are cases of those who would turn into undead after their soul lapses because of their grudges, but there are also cases of those who don't, and their souls disappear somewhere. The church claimed these disappearances to be "ascension", however, I find this claim dubious. It is possible that they may be reincarnated somewhere like in my case, and they may have disappeared with the same sense of loss I felt at that time. After all, I had no idea where I was until my soul was called upon, and after all communications were cut I had no idea where I was going as well, this affair is indeed full of mysteries. Though, the professor that I studied under did loudly criticise me for treating things that I couldn't understand as things that I could never understand.

Well, bear in mind that this is the reason why there are souls that cannot be called back – or rather, in most cases, spirits can't be called back. In general, if all souls could be called back, there wouldn't be a maze of unsolved murders, nor would there be any unresolved mysteries left in history. Living in that kind of world may sound convenient, but it must be a rather dull world indeed.

Besides, the mystery of “so what exactly is a soul?” is what we’re researching from now on so that we may shed light upon it, that’s what I believe.

That aside,

“Of course, Charl. After all, you are the expert in the field that forms the base of my research. Indeed, the one in charge of your augmentation is me, but seeing as I’m giving my all, the result will be special.”

“Yes, yes, yes... You words s, s, s, soothe me... I put my t, trust, in your skills, Oubeniel.”

Charl spoke, while stuttering greatly while he responded, during our conversation.

As I said before, he’s an important person for my research.

Immortality.

To realise that goal, it is essential to investigate the soul, which is the basis of intelligent life. However, I am only apt in governing over material substances, whether organic or inorganic. Death Magic is a different matter entirely. Although I may be able to use it to a certain extent if I desperately train, it wouldn’t be much of a use, and if I’m too busy with it, it may impede my principal occupation, as I’m an alchemist. For Uni and Drei too, their kind finds a better use of their magic in battle and exploration instead.

That’s where he, who has majored in necromancy for all this time in the academy, would be a great help to this challenging study of the enigma-riddled concept that is the soul.

“I’ll be the one who will rely on your skills instead. This sure takes me back, Charl. Do you still remember, about the academy?”

“Y, yes... E, even now, I can... still vividly, remember... I helped, y, y, your research... It was, f, fun...”

The professor also held that experiment in high regard.

The experiment to investigate the correlation between the soul and the brain. It was impossible to conduct that experiment without him. Due to the number of experimental bodies consumed and humanitarian issues, it wasn’t a particularly

reputable experiment, but the data taken from it occupied a particularly important position in my study of immortality too.

“Well then, let’s wrap up our talk here... Shall we begin today’s augmentation as well? Uni, anaesthetise him and prepare him for blood transfusion.”

“Yes, Master.”

As soon as she finished speaking, Uni quickly injected anaesthetics and put transfusion tubes in. In the past, I used to work around it by using hematopoietic drugs, but now it’s possible to use alchemy-cultured, pre-collected blood, in transfusion. Even though this sort of technology is difficult to realise even with the scientific power of my previous world, it’s available as a cheat since this is a world of magic.

“...Good, night... Oubeniel...”

Carl fell asleep in a clap.

As she gazes upon his peaceful sleeping face, Uni sighs.

“...He sure has changed a lot. When he was brought here, he cursed a great deal.”

“That’s because I have tampered with his brain so that it works that way.”

I shrugged as I replied her.

Charl held a grudge against me. As to how grudgeful he was, he loathed me as an enemy to the very marrow of his bones. When he arrived here after I ordered Due to haul Opus-04 as a experiment material off, he was putting on an absurdly threatening look.

According to what I heard, after I left the academy, it seems that he was terribly bullied because he cooperated with me in that aforementioned experiment. He also said that he was forced to drop out from the academy himself. That was why he had a grudge against me.

So, if he was to be left that way, there was no way for me to augment him peacefully, so first I let Drei use her evil eye to calm him down, and then I treated him the way I treated Drei. Because of that, he has since become a lot more cooperative, and he’s

now gladly receiving the surgery he once hated so much.

I personally think I did something good. Nothing good ever comes out of hatred. In order to create novel things, love and respect are needed first.

“Well then, let us do this carefully. It will be quite the difficult treatment, after all. It’s still effective to use as long as it takes until he’s perfect, so that we may utilise him safely later.”

“Yes, understood.”



Almost a month has passed since then.

“—- Final adjustment completed. Recovery from surgical scars confirmed. Master, Opus-04 will open his eyes in a moment.”

I gave my nod to Uni, who had been entrusted to do the finishing touches,

It took a long while. It didn’t take as long as when I worked on Uni, but it’s not often that I spend so much time working on one ‘masterpiece’ only. Indeed, considering that Due’s and Drei’s operation, which focused only on simple ability strengthening, took roughly one or two weeks, it would be easy to understand the amount of time and effort I spent for Charl.

“Finally, 04 is going to wake up, is he? We sure took our time working on him, though.”

“His refinement is different than ours, though, what plans do you have for him?”

The ‘masterpieces’ who have gathered in the lab to meet up have shown their interest in him as well. After all, from now on he’ll be their equal colleague. Of course they’d be interested.

“Well, about that -”

‘You’ll understand when you see him’, is what I wanted to say, but before I had the chance to say that,

“Huh, 04!?”

Uni raised a surprised shriek that was unlike her. At the same time, something cut through the air with a dreadful speed.

How quick was it? Well, when it was moving, a shock wave reverberated throughout the lab, and bundles of papers of written data and surgical instruments were scattered all over.

And in the centre of the lab, with its stretched, hanging hair covering its face, a ghostlike shadow descends.

It's Opus 04 – Charl Franz Schmidt.

“Hey! Could it be, he's running amok!?”

“Impossible... Master had him restricted!”

Due and Drei put themselves on guard, Uni and her fellows have already drawn their blades.

As I did not expect this situation, my eyes went round.

...Interesting.

I'm finally seeing a reaction that I haven't seen, from when I performed similar brain augmentations up until now, and in addition, from when I created all those prototypes on the test bed as well.

Just what in the world is the cause that is making him running amok like this? Psychological factor? Accidental effect? Or perhaps -?

In front of us, where we are staring at him attentively to observe his next move, Charl's shoulders are shaking.

“...Kuh. Huhuhuhu...”

He's laughing?

Ignoring our bewilderment, his fit of laughter is intensifying.

“Huhuh, FUHAHA—HAHAHA!!”

“This madness, I know it, he’s running amok...!”

“Master, your approval to dispose of him, please.”

That show of insanity seems to have strengthened Uni and her fellows’ thoughts to eliminate him.

However, I carefully signaled them to wait with my hands. If he really went crazy, and is now running amok, I would like to observe what he would do in that insane state of his.

Sure enough, in the next moment,

“...MAGNIFICENT!”

Charl spread both of his hands, with a thud, his black robe spread out. Naturally, his front bangs fluttered away, and with it, his expression was exposed.

...That face, you would know that it was an ecstatic one, even from a side glance.

“Huh?”

“This overflowing power in my body! This enriched magical power! This is... This is the new me?! Ah, truly magnificent! MAG-NI-FI-CEEEEEENT~~~~!”

With a sideway glance, I look at the first ‘masterpiece’, whose wild speech and conduct is out of rhythm since Due, as he started to speak as if he was singing while he was spinning on the floor using one foot as his axis.

...He sure is high in spirits. As a result, his speech is turning inside out, and he’s rolling his tongue as he speak, what a mess. Around the “enriched magical power!”, I also heard something about overflowing “soma power!”. What is soma anyway, some sort of a horsepower?

“This is just a guess, but... perhaps due to the excitement associated with the improvement of his ability, he temporarily loses his reasoning?”

Uni muttered in a daze. Well, I suppose that everyone knows that without being told.

Over there, his sharp hearing picked up her words to rebuke her, and with a vigorous thwack he pointed his finger,

“OOOH! HOW CAN YOU NOT BE E-X-C-I-T-EEEE-D!? I’VE CHANGED, THE WORLD HAS CHANGED, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED! THIS EXALTATION CAN’T BE HELD DOOOWN! THIS EXCITEMENT, HOW SHALL I EXPRESS IT? BY A SONG? CAN I SIIING!?”

“For the moment, calm down.”

“Ah, right.”

He calmed down for now after I ordered him to do so. It seems that there is no problem in the ‘asserting obedience’ part of the brain surgery. But looking at that blown-up state, I feel like I lost a bit of my confidence...

“Say, Milord. For that gloomy bastard to become like this, just how, and what part of his brain did you tamper with?”

Says Due while he looks like he’s trying to endure a headache. As he was the one responsible for securing Charl, this complete change might be a little bit too much for him. No, he probably finds the change to be unexpected. Even I feel so as well.

“...In order to eliminate the enmity that he held against me, I integrated and converted that to vexation towards his self-powerlessness and anger towards his unsympathetic surroundings. Perhaps, now that he has acquired intensified power, it also has doubled his euphoria as well. Technically, what I did to him was the same as what I have done to Drei.”

As I explain this, Drei has an extremely upset look resting on her face. Perhaps she doesn’t want to consider the fact that her treatment was the same as THAT. Though, according to Due, she herself has changed a lot as well.

“But still, this is too much of a change, too suddenly... It’s good that his speech impediment is gone, but he’s far from what I have imagined, and his appearance seems to have changed too...”

So he says while observing Charl.

His previous self was pathologically slim and his cheekbones were jutting out, he



looked like an unhealthy young man. There were hollow dark circles around his eyes, and without that timid disposition that he had, he looked like how the world imagines someone like an evil necromancer might look like.

However, it was all changed after the operation. His slender figure remains unchanged, but his body is now compactly well-proportioned, his slit eyes looks completely refreshed, and now his facial features looks like that of a good-looking young nobleman. It's just that he's a lot whiter than he was – no, it's just that he's a lot paler now.

“Perhaps, it's a racial effect.”

“Race, you say?”

Drei blinks.

“Since he's no longer human, you see. Now Charl is a high undead... an artificial Vampire Lord.”

“Buh! Va, vampire lord!? Isn't that the monster that has the highest rank of risk as a subjugation target, even for a quest circulated to A-ranked adventurers!?”

Due bursts out spontaneously.

To that astonished look of his, Charl snorts in pride.

“That is corrrrrrect! With the assistance of my master Oubeniel, I have now transcended from being a lowly human to the side that tramples over it! In other words! THE LORD OF! T-H-E N-I-G-H-T!”

He flutters his black robe each time he emphasises anything. I know that he's feeling good, but our conversation will go nowhere this way. By the way, even if he refers himself as the Lord of the Night, one might understand from the fact that there's no “von” attached to his name, while he came from St. Gallen, that he's actually of common birth. He's not that much different from Due.

“Sorry, can you tone it down a little bit more?”

“Ah, my apologies, I got too carried away...”

All right, I got him to be quiet.

Drei slips in a word, while holding her temple.

“However, is this fine, master? I’m a dark elf, but my existence is tolerated in the human’s domain as long as I’m a slave, but this thing over here is a vampire... a lord on top of that. What might happen if his existence were exposed?”

Indeed, her apprehension is reasonable.

Even though as a viscount I’m allowed to keep demi-human slaves and magical creatures that humans can tame, vampires are counted among the dangerous monsters, and even a king would not be allowed to keep them around. After all, it is one of the strongest adversaries against mankind. On top of that, they have the ability to rule over a person whom blood they have sucked, and can create kin from that. Of course such dangerous living (or dead?) beings would be suppressed the moment people stumbled upon them. Creating and concealing him, even when I consider the works I’ve done so far, is my absolute heaviest illegal deed, against the law.

But, I’m not bothered by it. I don’t have to be bothered by it.

“Indeed, it would be a problem if he gets discovered. But from where, and how can he get exposed?”

The vassals working for this viscounty of Oubeniel are absolutely obedient to me. It’s impossible to extract any secret information from them. Rather in their thoughts, I’ve made it so that their instincts keep my interests as their top priority, they won’t talk even if you torture them. This has already been experimented with the slaves.

“But vampires suck blood, don’t they? Human’s blood at that. They might discover him during the process of procuring it...”

So said Due. That opinion was so becoming of him, as an adventurer who had hunted a lot of monsters. In truth, while vampires can hide themselves skillfully, seeing as they sometimes don’t erase the trace after they suck people’s blood, a lot of them get discovered that way.

However.

“Hey, hey, did you forget, Due? What’s in this lab?”

“Hah?... Ah! Now that you say that!”

Yes, there’s an ideal thing in my lab that can conceal the bloodsucking sessions of the vampire.

I lightly tap the thing with pride.

Blood packs for transfusions, with a culturing vessel.

“As you see for yourself, if it’s blood, I can use this to make as much as I want. If it’s only the amount for a vampire’s meal, then it’s as easy as pie.”

“Cause I’m a nocturnal, I basically only eat eat at night, though!”

Charl puffs his chest up.

Is this perhaps his attempt to make some sort of kindred joke?

“...And by the way, I mean to keep myself from sending him out as much as I can. His combat capability is high, but his main appeals are his superior aptitude for death magic, and his strengthened magic capacity to cast high-level spells. Basically, both will be utilised in my research.”

“Eh, what? Are you spilling my potential away? Aren’t you being a bit mean, Oubeniel?”

*TL Note: original for ‘Are you spilling my potential away?’ is 流すのかい?. Might be erroneous TL here as I can’t be sure, feel free to correct me.*

“By the way, Master. Putting aside the fact that he’s a necromancer, how did you prepare him so far to the point that he’s a Lord now? Well, so there’s that kind of raw material too.”

As Drei comes to me with a question, I ignore Charl who came with something on his mind and answer her.

“Now that you ask, there’s actually a trick here.”

“Oh?”

To her who seems to be immensely interested, I threw her the documents that had fallen to the floor. They were scattered about when Charl was being hyper a while back. The details of his augmentation is written there.

“Let’s see... Altered skeletal structure step by step to that of a lich’s? Heart and muscle tissue altered to that of a dullahan’s, liver of a kelpie transplanted in order to make the subject resistant to running water..... This is———-”

“That’s the gist of it. I replaced his body components to that of the undead step by step, and let his body adapt with them over time, and with that I gradually increased his compatibility with a vampire’s blood. It had an immediate effect, as he became a Lord-class upon swapping his blood to that of a vampire’s right away. This is thanks to all the materials that everyone has gathered.”

In other words, he’s an undead chimera that was built from a human as the base material. Well, a kelpie is a monster that’s closer to a magical beast than an undead, though. Among other things, it was good that we were able to procure the lich bones. Vampire blood can be increased by using the culture machine for blood transfusion, but bones can’t. The fact that I could procure a lich bone this superior in quality was a windfall in itself.

As expected, Drei begins to sweat as she skims through the document.

“How can you come up with all these... no, how can you actually execute what’s in here...”

“That’s a late remark. If it makes me closer to my goal of reaching immortality, I’ll twist my head around no matter how much, I’ll do everything too.”

“Oubeniel has always been like that, even when he was in the academy.”

Charl nods.

“But thanks to that, I’ve become beautiful now! And I’ve become strong too! And with the power of the kelpie’s organ, I’m not obstructed by running water like normal vampires do! By the way, how tolerant am I against the sunlight?”

And he said such a thing. Though I thought that that point was already explained before the operation.

Could it be that he wanted to let Due and Drei to hear about it?

“On the basis of estimation, you’ll be a bit weakened, but it’s still possible for you to do activities even in the sunlight. In addition to the Lord-class durability and resilience, you have physical fitness that exceeds common vampires. Though I couldn’t do anything about your resistance against holy magic. After all, you’re a number of undead jumbled together. I guess this is where the magic equipment comes in.”

“Thank you for your explanation, Master! THAT MEANS! I! EVEN AMONG THE VAMPIRES, AM THE ELITE OF THE ELITE! NOT ONLY FOR MY ABILITIES, BUT MY LACK OF WEAKNESSES AS WELL, YOU SEE!”

Sure enough, he boasts, as he grows even more energetic.

Well, even among my ‘masterpieces’, Charl is the one I have made most changes to. The power he has obtained is huge, so it can’t be helped that he gets excited about it.

“So, do you understand what exactly is he now?”

“Ah, yes... in a lot of different ways.”

“Truthfully, if it goes on like this I’ll get tired. Master, when you create the next ‘masterpiece’ please make it so that it’ll be a bit more quiet.”

Commented Due and Drei from the actual condition. It’ll be exhausting to interact with Charl. For me as well. Considering his personality before his augmentation, I thought that he’d be a bit quieter, it was unexpected that he would change that much.

And I,

“Well, deal with it.”

I limited my answer to that, and dissolved the meeting.



“Master, about Opus-04...”

As soon as it’s only the two of us, Uni begins to talk.

Well, I suppose, considering what kind of person she is, she would definitely have a problem with Charl.

I answer her proactively,

“Because of the instability of his mental state, you can’t tell whether the ‘obedience’ part of the surgery is working properly? Wouldn’t it be dangerous to put my trust to him?..... Is your question along those lines?”

“I see that you have already noticed. My apologies for my impertinent remarks.”

“Not at all, your concern is understandable. The bodies of the previous opus series were kept as humans or demi-humans, according to what they originally were. Now that Charl is classified as a monster instead, how far will the methods go beyond this? Of course one can’t help but to think about it.”

Transforming humans into monsters. That would mean that there would be a lot of change in quality of the soul... Say, for an example, that Villager A was bitten by a vampire, they would turn into a Lesser Vampire in an instant and it would come to harm people. It may be said that the change in quality of the soul, to that of a monster’s can be attributed to the loss of its human ethics.

Even in this world of magic, the thing called soul is still an existence shrouded in mystery. No matter what kind of effect it might cause, it still wouldn’t be a strange thing.

And more so, the monster he has turned into is a vampire. Vampires can raise soldiers under their control by their own will by sucking the victims’ blood. Leave him unchecked, and there’s the fear that he will catch me off guard while I’m sleeping, and this is where the other ‘masterpieces’ are not a match to him.

But knowing that, I still turned Charl into a vampire.

“As for me, I see that the possibility for him to betray me is minimal. The result of the trial assigned to the slave specimen before him indicated that almost all of their functions went under the brain augmentation surgery. I suppose that the principal cause of this exception was also after the operation to turn him into a vampire. His behaviour is a tad queer, but among the expected pattern of personality change, I think his case counts as a moderate one.”

That means: the data says that the risk is low.

“By the way. Uni, do you still remember the experiment I did with him back in the magic academy?”

“Yes, I believe it was ‘The correlation between brain functions of an organism and its living soul’?”

Basically, you treat a slave’s brain, and you kill them after that, what will become of their soul postmortem? It was that sort of experiment.

“And that result of the experiment was, that the cognition of the brain changes in line every time the soul changes in quality. So far, ever since the time when I captured him to the final point when I treated him in order to change him into a vampire, I have always induced obedience towards me when I tampered with his brain, every single day.”

“...”

“Also, from the result of the experiments conducted on the slaves on his test bed, we understand that a vampire’s regenerative ability is derived directly from the soul. The body restores itself according to the information regarding that body that is engraved on their souls. Then, we understand that the point of reference for that matter generally is largely dependent to the immediate state before and after their vampirisation.”

Basically, this is what I mean. Cut the limbs of Slave A and turn them into a vampire after that, Vampire A will then start to restore their body according to the carved information on their souls, and their limbs will be restored. On the other hand, cut the limbs of Slave B, let them heal and turn them into a vampire after that, in that case, their limbs will not be reattached upon their vampirisation, nor will they grow back from the cut surface, it will simply be a limbless vampire.

It appears that the difference between those two was caused by the state their own limbs was supposed to recognise. Immediately after their limbs was cut, slave A still thinks “they’ll grow back when it’s healed” upon the vampirisation. Whereas in the case of B, it is recognised that the limbs “have healed without them growing back” upon their treatment.

Such was the evidence that a vampire’s paranormal self-healing ability was caused

directly by the self-awareness that was affixed to their soul. The same thing can be said for Charl.

“And that means, that Charl was augmented with absolute obedience towards me fixed in his head. It is highly possible that his brain tissue remains at it is after his vampirisation. Obedience towards me has been functionally imprinted in him.”

Uni should have already understood if it's only about that. Hasn't she been my assistant for the last ten years? Which means, there's another reason behind her concern that was beyond that.

Indeed, she makes a rebuttal for herself,

“But I still think that there's a lot of unknowns, in regard to his transformation to a monster. In fact, in the case of Opus-04, there have been changes beyond his physical appearance that were not intended in the treatment.”

That's correct, there is still little data in regard of transforming a human into a monster. Since the consumption of body and other materials is something that isn't insignificant, the numbers of experiment in regard to this matter is limited, and the data outside my experiment can only be classified as anecdotal lore that can't be relied as a reference. Even though we have done a number of experiments beforehand, and even if a hundred of experiments yielded no problem, it may not necessarily be the case for the 101th time. In order to avoid that, it's necessary to repeat the experiment a thousand or a ten thousand times to increase the accuracy of the data. Moreover, the changes that happened to Charl were dramatic. His looks and personality have been completely changed. It would be impossible to not be alarmed against these irregularities.

However.

“Say, Uni.”

“Yes.”

“Do you think I trust uncollared slaves?”

At the end of the day, that's my situation. I don't want to die. Even if the chance is only one out of ten thousand, I still don't want to die. That's why I'm studying immortality. And for me, there's no reason to leave any room for betrayal in the 'masterpieces' that



are ultimately my tool.

And to that,

“...No. I think such would be impossible.”

My magnum opus sure understands me well.

The Opus Series and the brainwashed vassals are just highly capable slaves. At first glance, they seem to possess free will – after all if you perfectly turn them into a doll, their ability to make decision will decrease. It would be a vexing thing to have the number of instructions necessary to direct them multiplied, so in the end it's only a matter of efficiency. Also, in case that I make a mistake in my judgement, if their point of view becomes too uniform, there's the risk that there would just be a chain of failures after that, and so there's also the purpose to prevent that from happening. I have said this many times before.

In Due's case, I basically removed the function that may cause him to oppose or defy me from his brain. I've also made similar adjustments to Uni.

In Drei's case, she was made obedient after I reattributed the subject of her sense of belonging from her clan to that being a slave of mine. As an additional safety measure, I also kept her collar intact.

Then, what about Charl?

“In his case, in addition to the psychological surgery that was similar to what I did to Drei, I've incorporated several fail-safes as well.”

“And what are those?”

I asked Uni to inquire me of the matter. But she's a clever one. Perhaps this is just a measure of modesty towards her lord.

So, first, I'd like to hear her answer first.

“Well then, take a guess, Uni.”

“...There would be re-augmentations to ensure complete restraints on a regular basis.”

“Oh, then?”

“The interior of the lab is Master’s absolute territory. So to deduce whether it is possible to entrust everything to the restraint that has the ultimate power over him or not, we will test his loyalty, and measure his degree of obedience at a regular interval. In addition, in order to ensure that he will not make unintended movements within such periods, a magical equipment have been attached to 04’s vitals to track his location, and there’s a kind of a magical tool that can be activated remotely inserted inside his body as well.”

‘Was that correct?’, asked Uni, and wondered whether it was true or false.

I loosened my cheeks.

“Correct. As expected from Uni, you sure understand well.”

“It’s an honour to have you praise me. However, this was all due to Master’s guidance.”

She gently bows as she says so.

That is how it is. No matter how much I tamper with the insides of his head, there’s no way I would leave the man who held a grudge against me until a while ago with his powers unchecked. He will be my dog for the rest of his life. Even though I had kept him, what would happen by the time he could stand it no longer? At that time, since he’s an undead, he will turn into a mere corpse. No, since he’s a vampire he’ll turn into ashes instead, I guess?

“Well, that’s how it goes. As long as he behaves as I have intended, you can calm down. But in the case that he deviates from that criterion—”

“Understood.”

That means that Uni will eliminate him without hesitation. Although Charl’s ability seems to be considerably high for a Lord-class vampire, on the flip side, that is all there is to him. Originally, he was just a student in the academy. Uni, who has accumulated a lot of combat experience, is still superior in battle potential, as one of my pieces. In addition to that, his specific weak point as an undead against the holy attribute remains still in place. Though, in addition, I have covered that with the magical equipment I’ve mentioned before... After all, to be frank, I have no obligation to give him a perfect magical equipment. It is easy to have him to self-destruct, should I will

it. In addition to that, the remotely activatable tool against the undead that Uni considered, has already been inserted in his body as well.

“Though it would be the best if it didn’t come to that...”

I said as I took a seat to take a break.

“Well that’s that. While he might be an undead, he’s not perfectly immortal as he can be killed if I feel like it. Moreover, he has already made most of the world his enemy just by existing. Though he will do well as a secret piece of mine...”

“If that’s how it is, he’s still far from the point that Master desires.”

“— Right. I might have no other choice to do so to myself, should death approach me. For that reason, I had you remember the surgery method as well.”

“...Hopefully, your wish to attain the perfect form will be granted. I too am willing to commit all I have for that.”

Of course, that’s what I hope too.

As I reply to her, I tap the armrest of the chair with my fingers.

She promptly grasped my intention and brewed me a warm cup of tea.

# Chapter 15

## Roars of Laughter from Beneath the Grounds

In the gloomy tunnel, fresh blood flutters.

Blood, meat, bones. In the twinkling of an eye, the scenery that the lantern scantily illuminated is dyed in a grotesque colour.

In spite of this amount of gruesomeness, no screams are heard. Why indeed? That is because this massacre was done all too quickly. In exchange of the screams, the loud laughter of the perpetrator resounded all over the tunnel.

“Kukuku... haahahaha!! Fragile! Fragile! Too fragile! What’s this, they’re not responding at all! If this is all they’ve got, it wouldn’t even be enough as a warm-up now would it?!”

The figure of the person that raised this voice was someone with a matching top-and-bottom suit, a blood-red scarf, and a black mantle coiling around his body, a youth with a noble air. Though his elegance did not match the darkness under the damp soil in itself, there was one eye-catchingly strange thing about him.

It was his hand.

The nails had grown and crooked in a bizarre way, as if it was an instrument of torture or execution.

Those outlandish nails seemed to outline the ruthless nature within him. It was the very weapon that massacred the true inhabitants of this dark dannel.

“Pugiiiiiiiiii!?”

“Gyagyagyagya!?”

Perhaps it was so much of a surprise, that even their survival instinct couldn’t help them from being frozen in their spot, as those who was left behind raised their screams of amazement a little too late.

As one might have known from their cries, both of them weren't humans.

There were a number of follower goblins, along with an orc, as the leader of the flock. Both were the types of monsters which would normally make caves their primary residence.

Be that as it may that the only merits that the goblins had were their numbers and their intelligence that was akin to that of a child's, the orcs had a degree of physical ability that most common adults wouldn't be able to match. However, that was about it. For the starring actor of this massacre that, more or less, to some extent, possessed superhuman strength, these beings were not fit to be his match.

Maybe the young man thought so as well, as as soon as his laughter subsided, his expression turned gloomy.

"...Boring. How boring. As I thought, if this is all it takes, this is boring."

As he said so, he drew his blood-drenched claws closer to his lips, and then licked it – and then immediately spit it out.

"Awful. They're weak, they're boring, and their blood tastes awful. Ah, just why were you guys alive anyway? To think that there's an existence so worthless like you lot."

While he distorted his face in his unpleasantness, the young man shook his arms lightly.

Then lo. They watched as that claw of a weapon shrank, and then, sure enough, his hands regained its elegant form.

As their opponent put his weapon away, the monsters breathed a sigh of relief.

However,

"...You aren't worth my claws. So, die quickly. 'Sudden-Death Insight'."

What was delivered was none other than the cruel verdict of death.

It was a curse of instant death with everyone in his sight as the target. The freezing hands of death invaded the hearts of the monsters and promptly seized them.

“...!?”

For this repeated mass-murder, as one might’ve thought, there were no screams raised this time either.

When it came to, all of the monsters fell to the ground as if they were dolls whose strings were cuts.

As he found his satisfaction from watching the scene, the youth once again floated a smile.

It didn’t take long until his smile turned into a mad, loud laughter.

“Kuh, huhuhu... To think that I was able to cast this high grade curse without chanting... AHAHAHAHAHAHAH! AS I THOUGHT, I’M AMAZING! THIS NEW BODY! IT’S SO MAG NI FI CENT I CAN’T STOP LAUGHING!!”

“By all means, please stop. Your laughter echoes throughout the caves and it gets noisy in here.”

I couldn’t resist and called him out from his back.

Then he – Charl Franz Schmidt, ceased his laughter at once and went into prostration at lightning speed.

“Ah, yes. I’m sorry, Master. I got carried away, yes... my apologies.”

When I saw this change, I didn’t think that he’d been in his perfect form just now. I involuntary put my hand to my temples... The difference in your spirits is way too extreme, Charl...



We are at present advancing through the “Old Luire Mine”, one of the dungeons in Marlin.

The purpose of this expedition was to limber Charl up, to verify the profitability of the abandoned veins, and on the same occasion, to fulfill the request of monster extermination in the area that was raised by the commonfolk.

And since that was the case, one of my intention was to try Charl’s ability out, but...

“Ain’t gonna say anything about vampires being intoxicated when it comes to blood and all that, but there was way too much fooling around in your movements there.”

—- Remarked Due.

“So, imbeciles who’d cast an instant death spell on small fries like those do exist after all. What a waste of mana.”

—- Remarked Drei.

“...Against monsters with that sort of intellect, and strength. Surely words are unnecessary here.”

—- Remarked Uni.

Like that, the evaluation given by his seniors was terrible.

“Yes, yes... My apologies, dear esteemed seniors, yes...”

And the Vampire Lord was earnestly apologising.

He is possibly the first high-ranked Vampire Lord ever since the dawn of history to prostrate on the grounds of a mine while apologising over and over again, huh. So I suppose in a sense, this is quite the remarkable feat.

Looking at that curling figure as it begs for pity makes me think that all those talks with Uni regarding methods to deal with him the other day were all but needless anxiety.

*TL Note: He's referring to the discussion with Uni regarding what they should do if Charl were to go rogue from the previous chapter.*

...No, no. Complacency is something that I absolutely must avoid here. After all, he was still a prodigy that could be counted among the top five in the Necromancy Department back in the academy. And he's an inherently evil vampire now. The possibility that this pathetic figure of his might just be an act in order for him to be slighted by his surroundings is not zero. While appropriate measures have been undertaken, he would definitely be a substantial menace if he actually went rogue. In the previous world, there's this story called "brushwood and gall", and then there's Han Xin's tale as well. Just because he's putting up this unsightly figure on display today, if the tusk that could be used to turn against me in the future isn't taken away, then his threat level will not change. Let's handle him carefully from now on as well, shall we.

*TL Note: "Brushwood and Gall" (Wo Xin Chang Dan) and "Han Xin's Crawl Between His Enemy's Legs" (Kua Xia Zhi Ru) are two stories from medieval China with pretty much the same morals and conclusions. Feel free to Google it if you wish to know more.*

For the moment, just so he doesn't hold pointless animosity, let's patch things up a bit here.

Under that prudential consideration, I open my mouth.

"Charl, there's no need to be that ashamed. It's fine to try to do what you couldn't do this time later. Besides, you're primarily here as my fellow researcher, yes? You don't have to feel down when people are finding fault in your battles, which is outside your expertise anyway. Come on now, you're my 'masterpiece', act like one."

"Oh, Master! Master is, Oubeniel is truly magnanimous! I'm so touched I can't hold off my tears!"

And as he found consolation in that, he vigorously rose up, and then he stroked his own shoulders as he embraced his own body, wiggling while he was at it. Just how earnest is he here, anyway?

Well, whatever. There's no need to put my thoughts into something that's useless to be pondering about.

"At any rate, the first objective, which was to warm Charl up, is complete. Shall we



move on to the next objective? Drei.”

“Yes.”

As soon as she received my instruction, Drei starts her preparation immediately. The second objective is to re-examine the veins.

“Oh, Spirit of the earth, answer this query of mine. What might the mysteries thy concealeth be. Where might the riches thy storeth be——— ‘Wide Detect’!”

Along with her chants, the orderly mana released from Drei’s body changes into a spell that runs through the surroundings. It’s a wide-range exploration spell that borrows the power of the spirit of the earth attribute. Due to Drei’s unique affinity as a dark elf with the spirits, the synergistic effect it generates greatly improves the range and the precision of the exploration spell. Let alone this abandoned mountain mine, the spell should be able to locate resources in the surrounding underground area as well.

After a silence of a few tens of seconds, she raised her face.

“...The deposits here are no good. The excavated area and its vicinity has already been mined to depletion.”

“Saw that coming. No matter how little profit the mine had left, those greedy former deputies would still never let it alone.”

Abandoning the mines so that it became a nest for monster, and then leaving it alone must have had a cause. Well, it doesn’t matter, I never expected much in the first place anyway.

“However—— please rejoice, Master. There was an indication that there’s a large copper deposit fifteen kilometres to the northeast from here.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful!”

Copper mining, if it could be made into a large-scale operation, then Marlin’s finance will greatly benefit from it. Even from my own viewpoint as an alchemist, the fact that there’s a large amount of copper – which as a material may be processed into various things -available is a joyous one.

“...While it is indeed fifteen kilometers to the northeast, it’s within a rugged

mountainous area. The forests along the way are also thick, so it's not feasible even if we were to open a path."

"Ah."

I realise that my joy slips away as I hear Uni's remark.

That's right. As it is, this place is deep within the mountains. If I were to proceed further from here, just what kind of an unexplored region would I find?

Regardless of how promising the deposit is, in order to mine the copper, transport it, and put it into circulation, there must be a way to get there, and without it the whole deal is out of the question. I wonder how much gold it would cost me in order to expand the roads all the way there. I'm not that knowledgeable in this field of expertise, but I know that this'll cost me a fortune. At least, for the current budget of my territory, there's fundamentally not enough strength to bear that kind of a burden.

"...My apologies, Master. It seems that I've agitated your heart with that needless information of mine."

"Ah, no. Eventually Marlin will develop, and surely a time will come when it will be possible to expand the roads to go all the way there. There's no loss in bearing this in mind, in order to prepare when the time comes."

If all goes well, it'll probably take ten or twenty years, if it doesn't, we're probably talking about a century.

"Say, if Milord were to prepare huge golems to deploy there, wouldn't we be able to excavate it right away?"

Due chimed in.

Charl made an exaggerated sigh before answering him.

"Good grief. Just what are you saying? It'll have to knock the forest down, dig the mountain out, carry the mined copper... A golem that can carry out such large-scale work, wouldn't it be already at the scale of a super-weapon that the country does not allow possession of? The extent of use of the mud golem in the irrigation job was a different story altogether. They did observe it, but in the end a summons came from the imperial court for an enquiry into it anyway."

He let out a broad grin. It probably was payback for his criticism regarding the battle earlier. Bearing the brunt of that, Due's face became stiff.

"What you're saying is reasonable but... why is it so frustrating that you're the one pointing it out!?"

"HIH!? No, no violence please!"

As Charl reflexively hid behind Drei's back, he got a "don't touch my butt" from her before being kicked, rolling all over the tunnel as he tumbled.

Leaving out the skit that this statement started, for the most part, what Charl said was correct. If I were to make that sort of thing, the neighbouring residents who might witness that would go into a panic, and then someone would inform the Adventurer's Guild, and from there the story would go around the country. I have been contributing various things to Marlin through alchemy, but I don't think that I'm revered enough for the country to let me off in that serious of a matter.

If that's the case, then there's other no way but for me and my masterpieces to manually mine it... or so I thought, since that would be a bad move as well. If it just were soil and irrigation improvements in a scale that we did before, then any other lord could do it, provided they had a fairly skilled alchemist around them, but the degree of difficulty differs when it comes to developing a mine in the mountains. If the news that the operation could be carried out with just a few people were to come out, then it would make the Centralists and the surrounding lords to be greatly wary of me. I already have a bad reputation in hand, and my brother along with the Centralists are keeping an eye on me. I'm not in the mood to be involved in more unnecessary problems than I currently am.

"Well, there's no choice but to slowly and steadily explore the places around the mine. The fact that we can't do anything unless we do so can't be helped anyway."

"Yes. Besides, Master's main purpose is to research immortality after all."

Said Uni.

Just as she said, for me territory management is, to put it nicely, a source of funding for my research, or to put it badly, it's nothing more but an unnecessary diversion. Besides, as I was being too obsessive about it, I invited trouble here in the process, and that was me pulling the cart before the horse. In other words, as I'm now under the

watch of Marquis Lavallée and being sent Victor and his company, I had made a huge mistake. It was something to reflect over.

“Then, we’re mostly done here, shall we do the last finishing touches and then go home? Heeeeey, Charl! Do one more thing for me please!”

“Ye, yees...”

Charl, who wobblingly came near after being called, was covered with mud after he had rolled over here and there. Rather than a vampire lord, he looks like a freshly resurrected zombie from the bottom of the earth.

However, his skill as a necromancer, being an undead himself now, is one of the best in the continent. I’d say he’s probably among the top three now.

Well, from now on I’m just going to squander that talent in wasteful jobs, though.

“Well then, please begin to set it up.”

“Yees... five High Skeletons, was it not? If it’s only that much, there’s still plenty of leeway even without me chanting.”

So he said as he snapped his right hand finger that was out of his mantle.

— Instantly, a sudden change occurred.

The corpses of the monsters that he slaughtered along the way began to gather in one spot. And then they were compressed by an otherworldly force, losing their material form in the process as they turned into black particles. The particles were a form of negative energy, also dubbed as miasma. Although it is harmful to ordinary lifeforms, long-time practitioners of dark magic and monsters of darkness can manipulate it to cause various phenomenon.

“Oh... brethren in the dark, my kinsmen! Serve this beautiful and noble self, serve with bravery in your devotion! ‘CREATE SKELETON’!!”

Charl was floating a menacingly exalted smile, perhaps from the ecstasy of being in touch with the miasma as an undead, as he was casting his spell. That sight of his was truly becoming of a “Vampire Lord”, the wretched king of the undead.

However—

“Hey, didn’t this guy say something about not going to chant a while back?”

“...If memory serves, the words for the spell “Create Skeleton” isn’t anything like that.”

“Perhaps it’s an improvised poem. Though I will refrain from commenting about it.”

— The other three just had to say their riposte like that, though.

In the meantime, the miasma had cleared up, and the end product of Charl’s spell appeared.

For some reason, the bluish skeletons were bleached in atrocity, and each of these monsters were carrying a rough-looking sword and shield that appeared out of nowhere. The so-called Skeleton, or perhaps calling them High Skeleton, the superior species among them, would be more appropriate. There’s exactly five of them, just as I ordered.

“How strange though. The corpses were those of goblins and orcs, but no matter how I look at it, I don’t see anything but human skeleton.”

“That’s a given! Rather than keeping the deceased soul inside the dead body and turning it into an undead, I turn the dead body into a material and grant it a temporary life instead, thus it is a completely new undead. For a practitioner my level, doing something like changing the shape of their bones is E-A-S-Y!”

“This guy’s mood surely fluctuates too much for every little thing...”

The other masterpieces gazed at the dancing Charl with exasperation in their eyes.

If it goes this far, then I suppose that this is his inherent nature? It appears to be so. He always was a timid one during his time in the academy, but when he’s intimidated or being ordered, he still curls himself up even now. He stuttered slightly in the past, so I couldn’t get it, but apparently, there were times when he might had been in high spirits as well.

“Hey, hey, pay attention to the job until the very end. Be sure to set up instructions for

them too, okay?”

“Ahahaha! Thaaat’s an easy task—-!”

Though it wasn’t much of a job, perhaps because he got to show off his specialty, he sure is in a good mood. Since it’s better for him to be feeling happy when doing jobs, I’ll just leave him alone.

“Hear me here, okay, you people? ‘Draw whoever that trespasses into this cave into the interiors and then kill them’. ‘You don’t have to chase anyone who escapes’. And—  
—”

“And thus the High Skeletons are set in these caverns, I suppose it’ll get rid of goblins and other wild monsters.”

That’s how it is. Normally that would be the adventurers’ job, but unfortunately, on top of having poor transportation links, this Marlin is a land with only a few things going on in it. There’s no reason for the middle-class and upper adventurers to come here, and there’s no way a fledgling adventurer would have the funds to go all the way here in the first place.

There’s one guild branch established here, but that’s just one single branch in a large countryside where there’s comparatively no people in it, and virtually no business is going on in there. Their primary job is mainly receiving and sending stuff like letters, it gets to the point where they’re probably better off putting the “post office” sign there. Of course, there’s no adventurer that’ll accept subjugation quests there. So if you want to get rid of a monster in the Marlin Viscountcy, you’ll have to take the trouble to ask the guilds in the neighbouring counties, or the citizens will do it themselves, or the lord – that’s me – will suppress them personally.

However, the first option costs too much money. The second option has the risk to make the vigilante groups into rebel groups if they’re left alone and thus there’s a security concern there. The last option, the third, is troublesome for us. No, it isn’t because I’m lazy. The problem is that the monsters around here are low-leveled, and thus there are no decent drops that may compensate me for the labour of going around here and there. If I use the military under my control, if I move them around poorly, I may incur the costs of procuring provisions, weapons, and other various troublesome costs.

So, I decided to place some familiars in the dungeon, which was the monsters' colony, to exterminate them. Once they are set up, they will automatically hunt the wild monsters for a long period of time. Also, if I were to keep the familiars' degree of usage as it is right now, there wouldn't be a fuss, even in the one of a million chance that the common-folk or (as if they'd have the interest to come this far into the sticks) some adventurers with idle curiosity were to discover them.

I'm able to make adequate familiars using alchemy, but as I thought, in the end, that would just reek of being the job of an alchemist somewhere. And surely someone would eventually link me with the monsters that would appear in the caverns. Among the most promising candidates to do so, though I won't mention any names, would be a certain immature count when compared to his little brother, or a certain marquis who happened to sire a bastard in his old age.

And that's why I asked Charl, a genuine necromancer, to create High Skeletons, which may naturally occur and are possible to control. Of course, if it's just the for the "Create Skeleton" spell, then Uni or Drei can do it, heck even I can do at least that much. But, leaving goblins aside, it's hard to make a skeleton that can win against orcs. In addition, as we're weak in the subject of handling spirits, the accuracy of our instructions would also decrease, and a real human corpse would be needed to create one of them as well. It's not about the ability of the spellcaster, it's about the spellcaster's affinity to Death Magic.

Eh? If I need a corpse as a material, then won't I be able to get no matter how much I need from the lab, you say? Please stop joking. Even by chance, I can't leave any traces of my experiment outside. It's not because I'm afraid that I left some traces of surgery there, it's just that being careful where I should be is my principle. Ever since I still was in the capital, other than valuable samples of the corpses that came out of the experiments, I properly will burn all corpses until their bones break... Though, when I had to leave for Marlin, I couldn't take the samples with me, so I had to burn them as well,

Ah, it seems like Charl will finish his job soon.

"— Right, that's the end of it. I'm done setting up instructions, Oubeniel-kun."

"Well done. Shall we return then?"

As soon as I said so, everyone else gathered around Drei. Using the space transition

magic “Greater Teleportation”, we would be able to arrive to the mansion we’ve grown familiar of in an instant.

“Such a convenient thing, huh, this transition magic is. Thanks to it, even under these winter skies, we still can fly back home.”

Remarked Due keenly. That’s right. It’s winter now. Charl’s augmentation has just been completed. Though I suppose a reasonable person would’ve figured that out.

“In exchange of that, the spell eats away my mana, and if it fails we’ll fly straight into the walls. Don’t let go of my hand, alright? The farther away you are from me the more likely you’ll run into a transition accident... Master, your hand, please.”

I took upon on her words and grabbed her hand. Due is holding her other hand. Uni and Charl are nearby. If it’s those two, even if there’s a mistake by chance, their surgery would interfere and readjust their position as to prevent them from running into an accident. As for me, magic suppression skill aside, because the problems of absolute quantity are involved, it’s hard for me to step in when it comes to transition.

After Drei was done chanting a drawn-out chant so as to execute the spell perfectly, she closed her eyes and called the name of the spell in the end.

“...‘Greater Teleportation’!”

The providence of nature distorts, and through the dimensional wall we leave the abandoned tunnel. As long as the remaining skeletons do their job properly, we won’t return here for a while.



“I see... and so, at this stage, mining the likely deposits will be quite extortive.”

After he marked the map based from the information received from Drei’s investigation in red, Victor raised his face. Due to his ability and his status, he now occupies the position that’s akin to the chief of the domestic officials. Well, his predecessors was morally compromised and weren’t that skilled in the first place, though. Contrary to my expectation, with his known merits, the whole deal should not be a trouble for him.



“Although the amount of materials are more abundant than expected, it’s a shame that because of the cost and current technology, their practical uses is unexpectedly few.”

“Good grief, though even if it can be excavated, mineral poisoning will appear here and there and it will be quite tough to deal with. So, on the contrary, the fact that it has extortive cost seems to be a good thing.”

I said while relaxing on the office’s chair. Even though I have wholly delegated most of the job, I’m still obligated to put out a word when it comes to deciding important matters and anything related to alchemy. Especially in this subject, which revolves around the mine as a source of valuable material. If I can’t be serious at times like these, there’ll be quite the noise after this. Although their brain augmentation prevents them from betraying me, it won’t stop them from reprimanding me.

“You have a point. Well, in light of our current financial position, I’m afraid that we can’t afford to invest in mines.”

“So, from your viewpoint, what is the ideal spot for you?”

“This spot: it’s where copper, tin and lead overlaps. There are also mountains where gold and silver can be mined, but I’m worried that the country will butt in if we were to dig those out.”

Riiight, it’s never that simple huh? To put it the other way, a mountain of gold, or silver, would be put directly under the king.

“How unfortunate... if we could dig out that gold and silver ourselves, I’d be able to make as much magic equipment as I’d like.”

*“Your excellency.”*

“Ah, yes. Got it, got it, I’m properly listening. You recommended this triple deposit, yes? I’ll also make estimates for the pollution control facility later, so let me consult the person in charge.”

I responded hurriedly to his unexpectedly piercing reaction. Victor and Laubert, these people surprisingly don’t pamper me. Though that part was my doing, times like these would make me think that it would be better for me if I were to make them a bit more reasonable.

“I’m really asking you here. Mineral poisoning is a serious case... Well then, on to the next issue. It’s about the construction of your formal mansion that was entrusted to Laubert.”

“As I thought, was the land I wanted no good?”

I asked proactively.

The matter in question was about the planned construction site for my residence. I’ve selected myself a place where the land’s spiritual power is good, which is suitable for building in alchemy lab.

However, there’s some problems there...

“Of course it’s no good. The designated land was far too detached from the town. It can’t be used as an administrative centre that way. The one you proposed within the town is also out of the question. Isn’t that the place where the church currently is? You’re going to destroy a church in order to build your residence, even your low reputation will go rock-bottom this time around, you know?”

Victor’s reply was within my expectations.

The land where the spiritual power is strong and within the boundary of the town is mostly dominated by the church. Its purpose is so that the priests may use it as a ritual ground in order to cast large-scale holy magic. If I were to forcibly take the land from them, it would mean that I would be adding even religion into the long list of my enemies. Besides, as recovery magic is practised there, the church of this world also functions as a hospital. If the lord were to destroy it out of his own selfishness, it would be inevitable that the support of the people would plummet.

On the other hand, if the administrative processing capability were to decline because the residence was built far from the town, then my problems, in the eyes of the lot from the capital, would soar as well. How troubling.

“Better yet, can’t you just make your laboratory separate from the residence?”

“I wouldn’t be troubled if that’s possible. But, think about it. Every single day, the lord is seen to be entering and leaving a mysterious facility in a place out of town. If my brother and your father were to hear about it, they would gleefully come to investigate. To make matters worse, ever since I got here, my research has become too

radical.”

“That’s your just deserts though? As if a dark elven slave wasn’t enough, now you went as far as dragging a vampire into this. Had I not been brainwashed, I’d find myself running to the church, the High Court, or the Adventurer’s Guild.”

Even though his lord is venting about his problems, that’s what this vassal is concerned about.

I reflexively looked up to the heavens.

“Ah, good grief... I thought that I just got back from a dim underground dungeon, and now there’s this. Sigh, can’t I ever catch a break——”

At that time. There were something flashing in my mind.

—— *Better yet, can’t you just make your laboratory separate from the residence?* ——

—— *I thought that I just got back from a dim underground dungeon* ——

—— *If we could dig out that gold and silver ourselves, I’d be able to make as much magic equipment as I’d like.* ——

—— *Huge golems to deploy there, wouldn’t we able to excavate it right away?* ——

—— *Such a convenient thing, huh, this transition magic is.* ———

Those words became a dot, and then a line was created between them, as they linked with each other, they built a picture.

This is... by any chance, could this idea be viable?

Or rather, how come I couldn’t figure out something this simple?”

“Your Excellency? Are you okay?”

“— That’s right, yes. If it’s like that, then won’t it all be okay? In the unlikely event where their investigating hands were to break into the residence, with this move, it wouldn’t be a problem...”

Paying no attention to Victor’s words, I was piecing the plan together.

After I finished my trial calculations, I rose from my chair and called her.

“Uni.”

“Yes, by your side.”

Victor’s eyes went round as he saw that Uni appeared without a sound, but I ignored him.

I don’t do it so much now, and besides, Uni appearing as soon as I call her should already be a common knowledge around these parts.

“The construction of the lab will be moved ahead of schedule. We can’t afford to leisurely wait until the snow thaws. Let’s start right now.”

“As you wish.”

“Ple, Please wait, Your Excellency. Lab construction, right now, you said? Where would that be? And what about the new residence?”

Victor’s somewhat noisy. But well, if he hears this idea, he will be silent and go along with it.

“As for the plans for the new residence, I’ll leave it to Laubert and you. Build it wherever you wish. If you’re the one building it, even if it’s seen from a nobleman’s perspective, you won’t build that much of a weird building now, will you?”

“That goes without saying though...”

“But you’ll have to make a mansion with a large basement in it. You can build it under the pretext of storage, or a wine cellar.”

“Will that be fine for the lab?”

“As you suggested, I decided to build it apart from the living quarters. The place is... right.”

After thinking for a moment, I pointed to a spot in the map.

“Let’s build it here. It’s decided.”

As he saw the spot that I pointed at, Victor’s mouth hung open without his usual grace of a young nobleman.

It’s probably because of the construction site I proposed. On top of being too far detached from the town, no matter how one might think about it, it would be impossible to make something like a lab there.

But, that’s where this idea is brilliant.

“Ju, just what are thinking, Your Excellency!? Your Excellency!?”

As I heard his confused voice which I haven’t heard for quite a while, Uni and I left the office.

I walked in an excited, exhilarated manner that was so unlike me.

Although one of the vassals who passed me in the hallway found it creepy, I didn’t pay it any mind.

“It’s good that Master’s happy. Well then, what might you be thinking of?”

“Yes, well, hear me out.”

To Uni who boldly asked me, I confided her in this idea that I just thought of.

As if she had just heard something impossible, she blinked her eyes several times over.

“That is quite the outrageous idea...”

“Are you opposed to it?”

“No— I do not mean it that way.”

Uni seemed to be taken aback, but she soon gave me her seal of approval.

Like during that time with Charl, she said so without overlooking her apprehension no matter how small. I'm becoming more and more confident in this idea.

# Chapter 16

## Party Night

Construction of the Lord of Marlin's new residence, which was started during the arrival of spring, advanced at an astonishing rate, and has now been completed.

Because the territory was a remote land, they couldn't be elaborate with the mansion's decorative side, thus the construction progressed in favour of the mansion's functional aspects only.

As the viscount's golems were put into work, and as the population was mobilised, the foundation works were finished at a considerably rapid pace.

The mansion was built as the base of the Viscount's sitting administration, but unlike the deputy's manor which laid in the centre of the town, it was located outside of the fortified town. As the mansion served to manage the administration of the entire viscountcy and not only the county town of Marlin, it was located near to the intersection of the highway which extended throughout the region. At the same time, the deputy's manor, which was once the viscount's temporary residence, was left as an office for vassals responsible for the town's administration.

The newly built residence was more like a small castle, rather than a mansion.

The mansion is surrounded by a bailey, which itself is enclosed by a deep moat, and watchtowers are affixed to the main building. Since the mansion lies outside the fortification that protects the town, their presence is a given as a countermeasure against bandits or monsters.

However, for a building that claims to have disregarded appearance in pursuit of its utility, its hard, rugged appearance casts an intimidating impression to its surrounding, in a different sense than the deputy's manor – which lords over the townscape.

If a stray traveler were to see the figure of this residence illuminated by the flashes during a thunderstorm, they'd go, 'Good Lord, is this the Demon Lord's castle, where evil spirits dwell?' as they went to be frightened out of their wits. Really, what a

pretentious piece of structure.

“What an eerie-looking dwelling. I’d say that it is just so like that little brother of his, though.”

There was a building that couldn’t be called as a mansion nor a castle that sat on top of a small hill at a distance from the viscount’s residence. From there, a man muttered this ironically.

The man was dressed in starched formal clothes, and there were no sunburns on his skin. His beard was well kept. From the way he dressed, he probably was a noble, but from the quality of his clothes, it could be surmised that he was a humble subordinate of another house.

The man haughtily took a glance backwards.

“Listen well, you people. We will now head for the viscount’s residence, but I’ll say this over and over again. Yes, over and over again. Make sure you don’t draw any attention to yourself, okay?”

He was talking to the four figures who held themselves at a distance behind him.

Their attire were completely different to the man who dressed like a nobleman, in the way that they seemed to be boorish. While they kept their appearance as tidy as they could so as to keep their appearance proper for a visit to the viscount’s residence, they only wore things like chain mail, breastplate, and clearly, weapons. And even when dirt and filth had been brushed away from them, it was still obvious from their appearances that those things had been accumulating quite the damage from battles, as small scratches were engraved here and there.

For a band of escorting knights, their arms had no sense of unity, and the things they wore as decorations seemed to be unrelated with each other as well.

And a group of people who could still move alongside the nobles while having such characteristics. In this Ithuselah continent, there was only one possibility as to who they might be.

They were adventurers.

“I said we got it. You expect us to be on our best behaviour, like a temporarily hired



escort should, right?"

Said the lightly-equipped swordsman that seemed to be the leader among the four men. While he indeed wore a breastplate, and his armour covered his elbow, knee, and shin, one may see that they weren't designed to protect his body. They were equipment made for the classes of vanguard that go on the offensive, in order to protect those areas from being hit by the sword while they nimbly move around.

"But you won't mind if we were to indulge in the feast's leftovers, yes? It's not often for us to partake in a noble's banquet. I wish you'd give us that leeway at least."

"...Do whatever you want. Though I myself will try to keep whatever they're serving from entering my mouth as much as possible."

Said the noble-styled man as he snorted.

"After all, the other party is that notorious 'Slave Murderer'..."



Today, at the new residence of Lord of Marlin, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel, a banquet to celebrate the residence's completion is being held. Various stakeholders have been invited to this feast.

The main participants were the neighbouring lords, the viscountcy's upper class, regular and irregular merchant – and the head of the noble house of Oubeniel which entrusted the land to him.

However, the viscount's brother – the count and the head of that family – was being occupied by a business he couldn't let go of at that time in the capital, and his delegates had been sent to attend instead. Everyone knew that it was only an excuse, though. The true reason, which is the discord between the two brothers, had been a public secret after all.

The Broussonne-based adventurer party, "Green Squad" had come to this place under the pretext of being the escort to that said count's delegate.

"Still, the place is more bleak than I imagined, or rather, the plainness of this residence."

Said Gael, the “Green Squad” leader, as he glanced around the entrance hall.

Red carpet was laid on the floor, and since the place was newly constructed, not a single speck of dust had fallen from the ceiling. But there was a scarcity of things like arts or decorations which usually could be found in a wealthy people’s house. The only painting there was, was a *reproduced* portrait of the first head of the House of Oubeniel on the landing of the staircase leading to the second floor, which was connected by a stairwell. Things like statues in the centre hall, or the vases or pedestals that usually were at the ends of the corridors – it could be said that the things that Gael thought should belong in a nobleman’s residence was extremely few.

“He’s living really modestly, isn’t he?”

So he asked to his client, the delegate, with a low voice.

He thought that he’d be ignored, but instead the man replied as he turned his head.

“Well, I suppose he’s forced to do it. After all, like what you saw along the way here, this territory lies far in the countryside...”

The colour of apparent scorn and contempt lurked within his tone of voice.

Being an aristocrat means being involved in the business of selling appearance. Putting expensive art objects and furniture at one’s home is a great opportunity to show one’s status to their visitors. So what happens in this mansion’s case where expensive things like that are scarce? The answer is as one may see. The owner would be made light of by the other nobles. At the very least, people would think that the owner couldn’t even afford to deck out their own property.

Of course, if one were to continue to spend high on things that didn’t match their wealth, then people would deem that person as a squanderer, and in cases where the furniture did not follow a certain style, then, yet again, the person would be made light of as a tasteless one. Considering those areas skillfully was supposedly what the respected nobles in high societies do. However, in Tullius Oubeniel’s case, it was as if giving that thing over is out of the question.

Guessing from the look of things around him, Gael thought to himself, ‘man, being a nobleman is tough..’

“Too bad... I thought I could see the so-called treasures of the nobility.”

The warrior, which was the youngest among the party, grumbled as he wriggled his hands around casually.

His fellow magician poked his head lightly with his cane.

“Ouch!?”

“Please stop it, you’re being rude. It’s because you say things like that, that people are spreading nasty gossip that we’re thieves behind our backs.”

The guild has been dubbing the job of “unlocking keys, disarming traps, scouting and the sorts” as what the “rangers” did. Actually, the outdated custom was to call the person doing these tasks as a “thief”.

But, currently, the word “thief” means exactly what it is. However, the changed form of the job title is only occasionally used, so that people do not confuse these people with the target of their subjugation quest, the custom to call them that took root, and once a thing has taken root, it will not easily go away. In fact, currently a lot of former thieves have turned over a new leaf to be rangers.

“Cease the skit. We’re currently the guard escort of this noble gentlemen over here.”

“Indeed. Let’s not do anything unsightly, we should be careful so as not to hurt our client’s honour, and ours as well.”

Gael chimed in to agree with his fellow vanguard heavy warrior.

Having witnessed that, the noble client diverted his line of sight from them and sighed. If Gael and his other man didn’t advise their fellow people, surely they would get a handful from himself.

It was at that time.

“Oh, well well well——-”

A young noble was descending the stairs of the hall, and he was accompanied by a blonde man that seemed to be his vassal.

‘His facial features, they look young. I’d say he’s probably not in his twenties yet.’

His attire was strenuous. Over the gold-embroidered deep crimson justaucorps was a silver-embroidered black vest that accentuated the former. A shiny white cravat adorned the bottom of his neck. He dressed like a dandy that would stand out in the capital’s evening party, though regrettably his face was too plain to wear that clothing in a stylish manner. He did by no means look ugly, (to the contrary, he was rather well-proportioned), but somehow there was not enough of air of magnificence about him. That gently smiling face too was, for some reason, vaguely giving the impression that he was feeling troubled because he was suddenly forced into what he was wearing. The young vassal that was accompanying him would look better in that attire.

“— Greetings, you are my brother’s delegate, yes? Welcome to Marlin. The name’s Tullius.”

The way he gave a slight bow as he spoke indeed gave the impression of a good-natured son of a nobleman who was not yet used to the ways of the aristocracy. It was almost enough for Gael to forget about various ill-rumours that he heard about him.

But he could not afford to forget. The young noble was the cause of House Oubeniel’s loss of reputation in Broussonne’s society. He was so abhorred people went so far as to call him the “Slave Murderer”, or the “Man-Eating Snake”.

Sure enough, the delegate floated him a smile.

“Goodness me, it is a great honour to be received by Your Excellency, the viscount, himself.”

And he greeted him back with teeth-grating flattery. Seeing that change, it would be hard for someone to imagine that he just spoke ill about the young man using the strongest words possible just a while ago.

While being stumped by the so-called facade of the aristocratic society, Gael and his fellow “Green Squad” took to their knees to greet the noble.

“Oh, who might these gentlemen be?”

“Hired men to escort me in my journey, these men are adventurers.”

“I see. Indeed, the roads have been dangerous recently... Name yourselves, please.”

As he issued his permission, Gael raised his face.

"I lead the 'Green Squad' Party, my name is Gael."

"This is the first time I've heard of that party, your rank is...?"

"Yes. We've received the C-rank rating from the guild."

"C-ranked, huh... I wonder if you are in the upper tier among the middle-rank. For doing something like journey escorts, you have quite the reasonable number of men."

'Oubeniel displayed an unexpected familiarity with the adventurers' circumstances. No, considering that he's the master of that "Silver Wolf" who reigned over the capital until a few years ago, of course he'd know at least that much.'

"The Silver Wolf Uni". Gael had crossed paths with her several times. She was an eerily expressionless lady of whom not one soul knew about what was going on inside her head. She did perfectly even in quests that demanded a fair amount of skills, and despite being a solo, she was a monster who fulfilled an unusual amount of requests during a short period time. The fact that she might be somewhere in this hall made Gael couldn't help but to worry about the future of this job.

"As squalid as these men might be, I sincerely hope Your Excellency might extend his hospitality to them too."

"...Victor."

"Yes, I will have someone to show them the way to the barracks at once."

The blond youth named Victor gracefully turned around and went his way to call someone.

'We've broken the first barrier, huh'

Inside, Gael was relieved. If the Lord Viscount were to refuse the presence of these band of unknown adventurers, and say something like 'why don't you use the town's inn', it would be a troublesome thing for him.

Viscount Oubeniel gently smiled.

“Until the time of the banquet, please feel free to enjoy yourselves. Though I’m afraid this is a new residence, and so there’s absolutely nothing interesting to see here.”



Gael and his men were guided to a barrack built in the premises. It probably was there as the lodging spot for the viscount’s soldiers in case of emergencies. They were placed in a drab room with only a pair of double bunk beds and a single table inside it.

“We will bring beverages for you gentlemen in a moment. Please excuse me.”

The maid who guided them gave them a single bow before she left. She was wearing a silver collar on her neck. Maid uniform and slave collar—- that combination reminded him of a certain face he’d rather not see if possible.

As he shook the feeling off, Gael called out to his companions.

“Hey, so how is it?”

“...There’s no sign of presence around. I don’t feel we’re being watched.”

Said the youngest warrior among them as he put down his hands, which he used to cover his ears.

“Still, there’s really a lot of slaves here in this mansion, or rather, this castle? Hah.”

“I know, right? Usually, maids are supposedly apprentices in lessons of good manners who learn through serving a lord, but...”

“He isn’t really popular, is he? I mean, the lord of this place.”

“Rather, it’s surprising that living slaves are swarming in this place. Isn’t it the word of the people that Oubeniel’s second son is someone with a bad hobby of buying slaves and later killing them?”

“He did it as an alchemy experiment or something, that kind of rumour?”

Then, the magician said,

“That story seems fake, apparently.”

“Is that so? I heard that alchemists do various weird research in order to attain their goal of immortality though. ”

“That’s just crazy talk. Alchemy is actually a field of magic that concerns itself with permanent transmutations of an element that’s already there in the first place. Like concocting potions from medicinal herbs, or enhancing weapons and armour with magic to make them into magic equipments. I suppose the reason as to why alchemy is seen as suspicious is because the job is basically about giving super-mysterious attributes to such objects.”

The mage’s words were sharp. Because he had learned magic earnestly and he had been surviving through life because of it, he wouldn’t want to believe the superstitious infamy of that one subject.

Probably finding the mage’s reaction amusing, the young warrior jokingly said,

“So, what are you suggesting? Do you mean that the viscount is actually a good person?”

“I wouldn’t say that far, it’s too hasty to say that. Alchemy is a fully-fledged subject of learning, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that all of its learners is a good person. Whether a scoundrel who’d torture slaves and then kill them really does exist or not, the matter itself not entirely impossible.”

“So it’s not that all alchemists are degenerates, it’s just that the viscount is a special kind of degenerate scum, is that it?”

“Well, I guess you can say so. Back when he was in the capital, even with a little research you would know that he bought a lot of slaves, so much of them that it wasn’t possible to pack them inside the main house of his old residence, It seems that some of them were brought here, too.”

“And among them is that ‘Silver Wolf’.”

“Stop it, just don’t make me remember that unpleasant stuff.”

Gael involuntarily moved his hand to his temples.

The “Silver Wolf” is C-ranked, which is the same as them. However, in practice, it may be said that she might have the ability of an A-ranked adventurer. To prove the rumour, a party of B-ranked adventurers crossed her once, and she annihilated them all by herself.

“Moreover, there are also talks that he’s got another adventurer with him too.”

“That B-ranked swordsman, ‘Two-Handed Sword’, wasn’t it? Supposedly, he was from St. Gallen.”

“Good grief. If that’s true then that adds to our problem.”

“Yeah, so basically we’ll have to slip through two adventurers who are ranked higher than us before we get to investigate, right?”

To investigate.

It was the main objective of the “Green Squad” that had slipped themselves into this residence.

The requester was none other than the head of the viscount’s family, Count Linus Streinn Oubeniel.

—— ‘Go and investigate whether my brother’s usual abnormal behavior has gotten worse. There hasn’t been any news about him ever since he entered this territory, but on the contrary, that’s suspicious to me. The probability that he might have taken hold of the officials that he recruited from the capital is high as well, and if that’s true, it’s possible that he hasn’t ceased his usual atrocious deed of slaughtering slaves. If you were to find a proof of that, bring it to me in secret’. And so on, and so on.

In short, they were a piece in this secret feud between the two brothers.

“—— Well, we’ll just have to do it.”

It was not that he wasn’t feeling disappointed after being forced into accepting the fact that thy were there as a nobleman’s hound. However, in recent years, he felt that the



“Green Squad” hadn’t been making much of a breakthrough as adventurers. It might have been said that they had reached their limits. Although they had been drawing attention to themselves from within the middle-ranked as they rose to rank C, their growth had stopped right there. For Gael, they lacked in a certain necessary thing to rise even higher as an adventurer. It might have been the talent for combat and exploration, or it might have been the adventurous spirit to challenge difficulties. He didn’t know what exactly that “thing” was. However, it was because of those reasons that they had been remaining in a standstill before the wall that is rank B for years now.

The moment he figured that out, he realised that at some point of time they had been looking for stability without even realising it. They scraped their lives through the days, they scrambled for the pie against the similarly-ranked adventurers and their seniors, and as the greenhorns rose into prominence, before long their decline surely would come. Before Gael had realised it, he had reached his thirties, and his fellow heavy warrior has reached it too. He felt troubled with those things, or perhaps it was fear, or maybe, what he felt was an aversion. The mage and the warrior still were in their twenties, but they had been in this trade for over a decade now. They were aware that their growth had been slowing down as well. Even if they were to continue doing this for a long time, they wouldn’t be able to rise so high up there.

Then what were they to do?... They may simply have no choice but to quit from being adventures. But if they were to simply drop out like that, for them who only knew how to fight, it might be impossible for them to return to a normal life now, they might be cast out to wander the streets or they might even go lower by making violence into their livelihood by turning into outlaws.

And so, there was this matter. They were being forced to do their noble master’s bidding and engage in intelligence work for a political feud. That itself was a painful road to take, but at least their opponent was a regular person. They didn’t have to fight a literally inhuman monster, they didn’t have to run around secluded and unexplored regions, and they didn’t have to ruthlessly compete with those groups who’d do the previous stuff while humming a tune. For Gael and his men, it was an attractive alternative.

To mention the fortunate thing about it, the still-young Linus hadn’t yet had any adventures for him to rear as his personal adventurer. If they were to occupy that, surely they would never miss a meal from then on. If they were to take the count’s hand now, surely they would be the most veteran among his ranks, and so they’d be

useful for a long time, which would prevent them from being easily discarded. Such was his forecast.

“This is going to be a tough job, but this’ll be the last one. If we can push through this, we’ll openly be under the Count’s house.”

“We can finally say goodbye to the days where we put ourselves on the line against monsters, huh.”

“If everything goes well, we might even be employed as his vassal.”

“And for that, we absolutely can’t fail this time.”

“Yeah.”

Gael hit his palm with his fist as he said so. Its dry sound reverberated in the barrack room.

“Our future depends on this. All the other people, whether it’s the “Silver Wolf” or the “Two-Handed Sword”. We won’t let them get in our way.....!”



Later that evening.

Numerous round tables were arranged in the mansion’s reception hall, and on top of every single table was an overwhelming amount of plates of dishes. They might have been presented by the viscount’s people, various meat such as beef, lamb, pork, chicken – all sorts of foods were aligned perfectly, and each of them were steaming fragrantly. Although Marlin is a mountainous area, dishes of seafood, which apparently was brought from Canales through the border with great pains, were provided as well. The star of the show was a baked shrimp that was as large as an adult’s arm.

It was a banquet to celebrate the completion of the new residence of the lord of Marlin, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel. Today, in this place where the utmost luxury was being gathered and commemorated, the lightly-groomed Gael and his men already had mixed into the crowd. In normal circumstances, commoners could never make their way into a place like this, but apparently even the farmers were also invited to the banquet. If one were to use that as a basis of their reasoning, then the delegate’s escort, “Green

Squad”, also could be included among the worthy guests.

For the adventurers, the fact they were being in a place where the gussied up noblemen and merchants gathered made them feel terribly ill at ease. ‘Just start already’, Gael thought to himself as he saw Tullius at the end of his line of sight, finally, he was there standing on the podium.

“Ladies and gentlemen. I offer you my sincerest gratitude for attending this celebration to commemorate the completion of this residence.”

Then, the newly appointed viscount cut his greetings short and got the ball rolling with these words,

“— Well, I’m afraid a greenhorn like myself is bad with tedious, dragged speech like these. Ladies and gentlemen, please enjoy yourselves. That is all.”

...And thus down came the curtain quickly.

Even from Gael’s perspective, that conduct had to be some sort of a joke. Shouldn’t a word of greetings in a place like this usually include something about gratitude to the king and the church and the like? The guests of honour in the periphery were seen to be dropping their jaw or leaking a laughter. Vassals, such as the young man called Victor looked up to the heavens and covered their eyes in shame.

“...This kind of behaviour is unexpected from a count’s pedigree.”

“Is, isn’t that because he didn’t want to keep us waiting?”

“Fool. Even if you wanted to be courteous, you’ll still have to give a word first.”

“I’ve heard that although he was granted a viscountcy, it actually was to banish him from the capital, now I understand why...”

The noblemen and the elderlies blatantly expressed their annoyance in that manner. While sipping the wine that had been served to them, they uttered several words of disgust and disappointment.

Of course, they didn’t rudely raise their voice so much as for Tullius to hear them. Perhaps because of that, Tullius, who had already gotten off from the platform and were then greeting the guests, was tilting his head in order to see the guests of honour

who were exchanging whispers.

“Leader. Even if we didn’t investigate anything, wouldn’t that young master be demoted from his post due to his ineptitude anyway?”

“Shhh!”

While rebuking the young warrior who carelessly slipped out that remark, deep down he felt that the youth might be correct.

Even from the viewpoint of Gael who didn’t know formal etiquettes, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel’s behaviour was out of the question. Truthfully, he couldn’t believe that the completely naive young man was to safely fare in the aristocratic society. After all, to his noble associates that were currently gathered in the room, the impression of Tullius was already absentminded at best and idiotic at worst. And that information would get into the network of social circles, and spread in a blink of an eye. Even that he was nothing more but an adventurer, Gael could at least understand that much. Because keeping an eye close and straining an ear for information about one’s peers works pretty much the same in any kind of society.

Meanwhile, at the hesitating noblemen’s sidelong glance, a group of people was approaching to greet the viscount. They were merchants.

“My, my. Your Excellency truly is an unique person!”

“Indeed, just like the adage in our trade, ‘time is money’”

“Greetings, thank you for the deal on the distribution of your potion. We’re looking forward to continuing this mutual relationship in the future.”

“So I’ve heard that you’re planning to open a mine nearby, yes? In that case, we, too, would like a share—-”

If was a storm of such adulation.

The delegate from his house snorted.

“Humph... What words for someone they’ve just met.”

“Perhaps they are saying these things in order easily lobby him in the future, ‘let’s get

ourselves some rights and concessions', is probably what they're having in mind."

Gael surmised as such. Even as they were sucking up to him, there were no respect in the merchants' eyes. Rather, their glare was as if they were trying to propose a loan for their household that's currently supporting a high-class beautiful lady. Butter the viscount up with skillful words, stretch their roots in the domain's economy, and then seize its flow of gold. Even if the lord of the territory were to change or even if the country were to seize the lord, as long as their invested businesses or projects continued to function well, the arrangement would mean that they still wouldn't be severed from their long-term source of revenue so quickly.

Sure enough, against that scheme, the viscount,

"Weeell, since we're currently in a celebration——"

Warded it off by stating so.

"—— Now, now, more importantly, please enjoy the dishes before they get cold. As you can see we have a lot of items ordered from Canales, though some of you might come from there, and you might have grown tired of these items already, at any rate, please feel free to relish in the flavours of this house's cooking."

"I, indeed."

"If that's what Your Excellency recommends then..."

So, he was able to splendidly use his mind to evade that. Though, why didn't he use that mind of his during the greeting? Even Gael was having a hard time understanding that.

"By the way, sir. Aren't you supposed to do your delegation stuff?"

"I know it already... I'm leaving now."

To that suggestion, the delegation quickly retracted his sullen face and went away to express his greetings.

As he saw that, Gael once again thought that being a noble is rough. Unlike adventurers that simply needed to be skillful to do their job, there were too much restraints in the aristocracy's line of work. But, there was indeed some sort of steadiness that couldn't

be found in the meritocracy of the adventurers' rough society.

And while he was thinking about that.

"Dear guests."

Someone called out to Gael and his men,

He turned around as his heart involuntarily skipped a beat. There was the statuesque stiff beauty, the composed-looking maid whose feelings could never be guessed by anyone. And on the back of her neck was the silver collar that was the origin of her title.

'S, Silver Wolf...!?'

In the entirety of Marlin, she was someone he had wanted to meet the least.

There was no mistake, it was indeed the "Silver Wolf". While she was indeed still in her teens, that figure which he hadn't seen during the years have grown somewhat taller, and while she had become more feminine, there was no mistake regarding her identity.

"Wh, what, do you want?"

While he promptly tried to keep a calm facade, he poked his companion who were petrified due to his shock to bring him back with his elbow.

'Why are you calling out to us? Could it be that she's suspecting that we're here to investigate?'

To Gael who were succumbing to his uneasiness behind his fake ordinary visage, Uni said

"...May I interest you in some beverages?"

She was carrying a tray with a bottle of alcohol and a number of glasses equal to the number of Gael's party.

His shoulders fell down reflexively.

“Ah, no... we’re good. We’re in charge of guarding someone. Surely nothing will happen here in His Excellency’s residence, but just in case, it’d be better for us to refrain from alcohol.”

“Is that so. Well then, please excuse me.”

Uni bowed after she spoke, and then she walked away.

While seeing her off, Gael and his fellow “Green Squad” gleefully breathed a sigh of relief.

“That surprised me. She was just offering a drink...”

“Anyway... So she really was a maid.”

“As an adventurer she always wore an apron and dress, I thought she was just being eccentric though...”

“Normally people wouldn’t think that she was really a maid, doing adventuring jobs in the sidelines.”

‘Seriously. The fact that she was only an adventurer in the sidelines and still ranked higher than them, and then the fact she was completely leading in terms of ability. When I think about it, it makes me feel that all I did in the past was in vain.’

“Still——”

The mage of the party opened his mouth.

“It has nearly been three years since she received her last quest. Assuming that she had devoted herself exclusively as a maid during those years, I believe this will help us a lot.”

“You mean that she has been on a hiatus?”

Indeed, that was the case. Adventurers are human too. No matter how much one were to increase their ability, if they were to lose the chance to use those abilities, then one’s proficiency would surely drop. Just like how horses that are kept in their stables all

day will no longer be able to gallop, adventurers who don't go on adventures will also decline as well.

"Hey, you. I told you my glass is empty so bring me a larger bottle, why took you so long?"

"Yes, my apologies."

"Quickly pour it... Sigh, paying attention to nobles before commoners is supposedly a common sense."

"It is as you say. My apologies for my ineptitude."

Gael's and his fellow's eyes went round.

That girl, whose prestigious title, the "Silver Wolf", resounded loudly in the capital, was lowering her head repeatedly to a vulgar nobleman who obviously was picking a fight with her. Once a bumpkin of an adventurer did a similar thing, and off with his head he went. And even though there was a story like that, what exactly was it that they were seeing? It was as if she was just that, a maid.

But the surprise just grew even further.

"Hmm? Do you want me to think that you're reaaaaaly sorry?"

"HAA!?"

As Gael saw that, he inadvertently did the reckless action of raising his voice in disbelief.

At Uni, who didn't show any intention to resist him, that quarrel-picking nobleman was currently using those hornworm-sized fingers to grope her buttocks, that buttocks of hers which people would know how well-shaped they were even when they were covered by her skirt.

He was groping it in a way that people could hear the sound of it being squeezed. Gael



could only think of it as some sort of a sadistic, perverted hobby of the nobleman. He acknowledged that her bravery of not reacting so far to the tiny details was as expected of her, but in this case, for her to not be rejecting him clearly was a bad move in itself. The middle-aged noble had a vulgar smile as he applied his mouth to bite her ears.

“If you really wish to apologise, then let me hear it slowly later? Alright? In the room your master prepared for me... Alright? Alright?”

Gael didn't actually hear that, but what he said must've been something along those lines. He could tell just from the movements of his lips. And then, he moved to pinch the soft flesh and moved his hands as he spun them around like a slug.

“...”

Uni didn't react. She must've hated it. However, her status made it impossible for her to honestly resist the noble. To wear a silver collar actually meant this kind of thing. Rather, as a slave it was her behavior during her adventuring days that was abnormal. Gael had only realised this truth now.

‘Should I interfere and put a stop to this?’, Gael thought for a moment.

Even the surrounding guests who noticed this didn't try to stop them. Was it because they didn't want to get involved? Or perhaps it was because the sight of a good-looking maid being groped by a guest was a common one? In any case, there was no incentive for this bunch of people who held the viscount in scorn to move in. There was no one but Gael and his men to stop this.

Even though he felt that she was the least wanted existence in this request, he didn't want to see the “Silver Wolf” to fall even further than this. Even though he had to admit that they were no match for her even as a joke, she was still a remarkable fellow who was once in the same trade as his. Even if he didn't know about her achievements, as a fellow adventurer it was still unacceptable to see her being dishonoured by a man who was acting like a horny dog. He could feel that he was reaching his limit, he could feel the last remnants of stubbornness inside the old man who didn't want to get into trouble aching. The heavy warrior who was standing next to him had his throbbing eyebrows raised as well.

But just before that last thread of patience was about to snap,

“What are you doing?”

Her master, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel, broke into the scene.

The noble immediately retracted his hand which had been fiddling around with her buttocks a moment back.

“A, aaah, nothing... Hello, this girl just made a little careless mistake.”

It was an ingratiating smile, as if he made it to hold his tongue from clicking.

‘What careless mistake’, thought Gael as he couldn’t help but to click his tongue slightly. Wasn’t it just a lecher doing the thing he had in mind by picking a quarrel with her?

“Ah, is that so? Sorry for that.”

Oubeniel, who heard his answer, immediately lowered his head. The surrounding guests went into a roar.

“O, Lord Oubeniel! It wasn’t...”

“No, it’s a master’s duty to train his servants. If she did indeed make a careless mistake towards a guest, then it was a common sense for me to apologise. Will you please accept my apology and give her your forgiveness?”

“Yo, you...!”

Viscount Oubeniel’s apology warped the noble’s face to a great degree. The host of the banquet had made a direct apology. Pushing this matter another time would be equal to announcing to the surrounding people that he was a man without magnanimity.

As if to deliver the final blow, Uni knelt and kowtowed to the man. Rubbing one’s face against the floor is the highest degree of apology. As the master stood there and lowered his head, the slave must go lower than that.

“I would like to apologise for my rudeness one more time. Please accept the master’s apology.”

“I, if you’re willing to go that far...”

The noble ignored Uni and turned to Oubeniel.

“Ple, please raise your head, Lord Viscount. I will accept your apology. I, I’d like to apologise for disturbing this auspicious occasion by picking a needless quarrel, I’m very sorry.”

“So you do accept! My, thank you very much!”

Viscount Oubeniel was full of smiles when he raised his face.

And then the matter was settled. Although the noble was still dissatisfied with it, he left for the other seat, and the other guests of honour also turned away as they started to chat about things that wasn’t related to it. Only the viscount and Uni, who was still kowtowing, remained.

“It’s fine for you to stand now, Uni.”

“No, I have greatly wounded Master’s honour in this auspicious occasion—”

“And I mean that, too. I told you it’s fine. I’m not angry at all.”

“...Yes. My utmost gratitude for Master’s profound compassion.”

“More importantly, please stay as you are. Alright?”

After Uni rose up, Oubeniel personally brushed off the dirt from her skirt. In a new residence that have been meticulously cleaned, Gael thought there wouldn’t be a lot of dust stuck there. However, at the end of it, he was able to finally understand the intention of the gesture.

“Well then, let’s finish up with this. Turn your back towards me.”

“My back, is it?”

And then he struck— the place that was touched by the vulgar noble, lightly, as if he was cleaning it. His hand movements seemed to be truly gentle.

“Ahn...”

“Has the dirt fallen off, Uni?”

To those words, Uni gave her master a respectful bow with a colour of understanding in her face.

“...Yes. Thank you, Master.”

There were an indescribable flood of emotions packed in her words of gratitude.

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

Gael and his men were stunned by the sight.

What was that voice?

That faint, shivering voice, that was there as if to conceal the sound of a certain fervent heart?

Was it really the “Silver Wolf” who raised that voice?

“Hey, leader.”

“What is it.”

“Did we get the wrong person?”

“Would be great if we did...”

“But that face is definitely her...”

“And she certainly had the same name...”

The impact that he bore was different than the time when she was enduring the noble’s abuses silently.

If it was that, then it could still be interpreted that he held back because of his current duties.

But, now, that was impossible.

No matter how you look at it, she was gladdened by the thoughts of her Master. So ardently, too.

“What to say, it’s as if she’s genuinely happy, like a normal maid does...”

“Rather, isn’t this an illicit affair with that master of hers—?”

“Please wait! If you say it that way, my image of the “Silver Wolf” is—!”

“If someone were to tell me that she was a different people with the same name who is really alike to the original, I’d have an easier time believing that.”

‘Good grief’, Gael nodded.

As they gazed at her again, the person in question had already returned to her duties without realising their investigation duty. Her face was as indifferent as ever, but somehow she was making her steps lighter. It could be hard to be seen by an untrained eye, but if you were to be acquainted with what a kind of person she was after stumbling into her a few times, it was clear that the way she was walking was full of openings.

“The ‘Silver Wolf’ has waned... Can we see it that way?”

Gael couldn’t find something to instantly refute the mage’s remarks.

And after he thought about it for a while, he still couldn’t find anything.

Gael opened his mouth with mixed feelings.

“Even so, pay in mind that she might somehow regain her old self with some impetus. More than anything, it doesn’t mean anything if we were to slacken our guard even more than a waned person does.”

“That’s correct. And he still got another adventurer with him, right?”

“The swordsman from St. Gallen, the “Two-Handed Sword”

“Is it possible that he was hired because the ‘Silver Wolf’ has already become like that?”

“.....Probably.”

Before they realised it, the hours had gone far into the night. The banquet was about to come to a close, and the time for Gael and his men to do their job was drawing near.

“Anyway, don’t be careless. We’ll see through this job until the end.”

As he said so, he and the others braced themselves.

‘Estimate the sleeping hours of the people inside, then take the advantage of the dead hours of the night to investigate the nooks and crannies of the residence. Since the invited guests are hosted here, chances are that the security will be tight. And even though the biggest menace that is the ‘Silver Wolf’ has been weakened to a degree, I expect that this job won’t be a breeze...’

# Chapter 17

## Tullius Oubeniel and the Key of Secrets

Gael and his Green Squad had come prepared for this, all sorts of precautions had been made as much as they could as well.

However, the reality was beyond their expectations.

“Impossible... This can’t be...”

Gael unintentionally let out a groan.

They had come with layers upon layers of caution, they had been using their limited time frugally, but when the time to investigate finally came, this was the result.

Really, this upset, just who could be blamed for it?

“Is this, is this really okay?”

The heavy warrior let out a loud, trembling voice as well.

It was something he ought not to do in a secret investigation quest like this.

But no one stopped him from doing so. So he didn’t stop.

“It’s way beyond my expectations, how these things went...”

The mage held his head in his hands, for he couldn’t believe the sight before him.

For what he saw had transcended beyond his common sense.

Then, the party’s vanguard, the ranger whose primary mission was to probe, muttered.

*TL Note: the **nobushi** (guerrilla warrior) will be translated as **ranger** from this point on.*

“This residence——”

Gael already knew the words that would follow after that.

Of course, the heavy warrior and the mage had already known as well. But no one would stop him from saying the rest of it.

Because doing so would be meaningless. The willpower to do so in the first place had already been completely exhausted anyway.

The ranger went to conclude his words.

“——— is way too unguarded...!”

He held his head as he spoke.

...Indeed, the residence’s security was so loose to the point it was practically nonexistent.

As anyone would expect, sentries had been posted by the guests of honour’s lodging section and the master of the house’s – the viscount’s, bedroom.

However, since all they were doing was just standing there, they were only as good as scarecrows. Besides, since all they did was to put the slaves in a steward’s uniform, it would seem that everyone there was unlikely to do their job correctly. If Gael were to make noise somewhere in a different spot to lure them out, they’d simply leave their post and head there, which in turn would allow Gael and his men safe passages as the result.

To put it bluntly, as guards, they were among the worst of the worst.

“So it’s not only limited to the furnishings, it seems that they couldn’t afford to put money for security as well, huh...”

“Really makes me doubt whether that appalling secret that the client told us about truly exists at all.”

The mage said.

Important documents related to the administration and the treasury was secured as



expected, but the only problem they had was the locks. They let it go this time, but had they got the time, it would be easy to break through them anytime they wanted. They caught the sight of a small room that seemed to be an alchemy lab, but the mage commented, "It's a facility to compound medicinal herbs. The equipment here isn't enough to make anything large-scaled."

So far, their infiltration through the residence's security had been going well, however their investigation of their target's – the viscount's, weakness had produced no result. That success was thus meaningless.

"But there are still sections that we haven't checked yet, yes?"

"...Yes, the eastern wing of the main residence's first floor. Though there's also a staircase leading to the dungeons in the west wing as well."

"Then, is there a staircase leading to the basement as well?"

By the way, there was nothing in the dungeons' cells. As no one was being held in those cells, it was nothing but a deserted guardroom. They were requested to carefully search the basement in particular, so they tried to affirm whether any sorts of hidden passages existed or not, but Gael hadn't been able to find anything like that.

"The room behind the main hall was the wine cellar, yes?"

"Yeah, nothing's there too. Rather, there wasn't even a lot of wines there."

"They were mostly already served in the party, I guess."

That means, if there was really something there, it would be in the unexplored eastern wing of the main residence's first floor, but

"...Wait."

Gael called out to his companions in a small voice. As expected from a veteran adventurer party, immediately after they observed the intention of their leader, they stopped from making any voice or movement at once.

After he confirmed that they did, Gael stared at the darkness of the end of the corridor.

'...It's there.'

It was there, by their destination— the east wing, at the end of its corridor.

Leaning invisibly on the corner was a tall man who had no presence about him. There he quietly stood, hiding to the point that he was not sensed even by the ranger, their vanguard. It was probably Gael's sixth sense, which had been tempered through many brushes up with death, that made it possible for him to sense his presence. For the time being, they managed to perceive his presence before their encounter.

(Could he be... the guy known as the "Two-Handed Sword"!?)

'I can't help but to feel terrified. From his title only, it was easy to tell that this adventurer called Due knows his way with the sword. Just, how to go about him who could still remain hidden against our first-class ranger? Had we not realised it, if we just approached him carelessly, we'd surely end up being slain by that two-handed sword which I suppose was where his title was derived from. As I thought, he's a shrewd one. After all he's a titled adventurer whose B-rank surpasses our "Green Squad"—!'

(Leader, what now...!?)

The heavy warrior asked him whether to advance or retreat by his eyes only. If they were to consider combat potential only, then surely retreating here would be the best policy. If the four of them ganged on him they might be able to take down someone who was one rank higher than they were, but they had to take him down quickly, lest they would make an uproar. And when that happened, the guests of honour would mistake them as burglars, and the entirety of the residence would chase them out altogether.

Having said that, were they really going to flee just like that? Now that they had noticed him, it was possible that he had already noticed them as well. No, if he had been watching over this passageway as a guard, then it should already be considered that he had already took notice of them, seeing that they were coming his way. As soon as they turned their back, he'd probably jump at them right there like a wolf who had found his prey.

And even if they managed to escape, then what? As they contrived their escape, their client, Count Linus Oubeniel would say something like, "so you couldn't investigate enough because you were afraid of the guards", just how could they have the face to report that? The road to be promoted as the count's shadow operatives would then

cease to exist as well.

Desire and self-preservation was tipping each other over the scale inside his mind.

But before Gael drew his conclusion,

“Hyiiih!?”

The ranger carelessly raised his voice.

The shadow that seemed to be the ‘Two-Handed Sword Due’ began to move.

But just before Gael prepared himself as he thought that they were already discovered, that man—

“...Gruoooooooooooo...”

— let out a sleeper’s breath, then fell to the floor.

“..... Huh?”

It took almost a minute for them to understand what exactly had happened.

Could it be? One may believe it or not, but could it be that he had already fallen asleep when Gael first noticed him?

When Gael mistook him to be in hiding, and the reason why his bloodthirst and his warning intention wasn’t being emitted from his presence, it was all because he was asleep?

Was that it?

““Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa~.....””

All of the “Green Squad” members reflexively let out a big sigh.

‘That surprised the crap out of me’, they said as they found relief. ‘We went this far and we still aren’t being spotted, huh?’, the flow went naturally like that. Even for a moment, they had thought, ‘What will the guard do to us?’, and then the irritation that that wasn’t the case kicked in. That sentiment was mixed into their sigh.

“ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ...”

The man also let out a loud snore.

“...Leader, what do we do now?”

“Hah... just in case, make him sniff ‘sleeping powder’ so that he won’t wake up while we look around.”

“Right.”

Upon being instructed, the ranger approached him with timid steps, and then he thrust a scrap of paper containing the powder under the tip of the man’s nose. Indeed his nose took the powder in, as it invited him to a further deep sleep.

The mage let out a mockery at that sight.

“What an irony. The guard of an alchemist’s house was administered with sleeping powder, itself the product of alchemy.”

“Good grief... Hey, look. There’s a exaggerated-looking two-handed sword on the wall.”

“So, the guy really is the ‘Two-Handed Sword’...?”

“This guy...? B-ranked? Seriously?”

“Ngh, uh... Ca, can’t drink anymore, Milord... Mmh, nyah...”

Unaware of the “Green Squad” members who were looking down on him in contempt, the “Two-Handed Sword Due” leaked out a content-sounding sleeptalk. As his astoundment grew further, Gael prompted his companions.

“Anyways, let’s quickly look around in the area beyond this point. As expected, the stairs leading to the basement are there.”

“For them to make a B-ranked adventurer explicitly stand guard here, I guess there’s really something here, huh?”

“The B-ranked guy didn’t guard shit though.”

“Shh, stop the talks. We’ve spent a considerable amount of time. Let’s pack things up before the first light.”

Said the ranger as he descended the stairs.

The mage let his mana flow into a lantern-shaped magic tool, and a faint light illuminated their way forward.

There was no sign of anyone in the basement. Just like the dungeon in the western wing, no one was there.

However—

“What the heck...!”

An unusual wave of cold struck the group who had been negligent due to the lenient security. It sent shudders up to their spines, as they felt goosebumps emerging on their arms.

...It’s cold.

Although spring nights in the inlands are somewhat cold, this is downright abnormal. There must be a source of this inexplicable cold in this basement’s entirety.

At the end of their descent was a short and wide passageway, and at its end they saw a big and sturdy-looking iron double-door. If one were to open it, five or six people could pass through it together, side by side. Of course, a lock was attached to it. So there was that attached to the door, and then there were two chain-fixed padlocks, so it was triple locked.

“Just, what’s with this cold air?”

“So, so it wasn’t just my imagination, isn’t it coming from the other side of the door?”

“That’s not the only thing... There’s a mana reaction. Moreover, it’s quite big too.”

Said the mage, he didn’t try to hide his nervousness.

— A mana reaction.

— A large one, too.

— And then, there was this extraordinary presence.

Gael swallowed his breath and held it in anxiety. The viscount who passed himself off as an alchemist. If he really was hiding some shady stuff, then it must be beyond this door. They couldn't find anything in the other places. Then, this time they'd get it right.

"Alright... Let's open it at once. Then let's expose whatever stuff lies beyond this door in the daylight!"

"Oooh!"

They let out a low-voiced cry, and began to release the locks. The ranger was tasked to pick the locks, and the mage was to verify it. First would be the padlocks. Although it could be released as soon as the chains broke, when they tried to ascertain the chains' hardness by lightly brushing it with a knife, it was the knife that got scraped instead.

"...Just what kind of metal did they make this from..."

"Leader, can you break it?"

"I don't know. Though I fear that its loud noise upon breaking would make us noticed, if we leave them broken as it is, they'd figure out about our intrusion too."

With this sort of hardness, he didn't think that it will somehow open only by hitting it forcefully with weapons.

"No choice but to do it steadily. Begin."

"Roger!"

While shivering from the cold air that was leaking from the door, the mage began his unlocking attempt.

Both of the padlocks went out in less than three minutes.

The mage's eyes went round in surprise.

“Wow, well done.”

“Not at all, the locks had a different model, but their mechanism was the same... The door’s main lock will be the real deal.”

Said the ranger as he thrust a lockpick in the last keyhole. As expected, it was different than some shoddy affixed padlock. He knew that it would take time.

Sweat started to rush from Gael’s forehead.

What if, the effect of the sleeping powder Due sniffed had ran out.

What if, another passing guard noticed that Due was in a deep sleep.

When he thought about those things, his anxiety was getting unbearable.

“...It’s not open yet?”

“Shhh! Please wait for a bit more!”

The ranger gave Gael, who could finally no longer hold his words, a single glare. For him, the youngest, to show his irritation to his leader even for an instant, it was clear that he needed a large amount of concentration for this work.

‘It can’t be helped’, he went down a step, and then switched his attention to the stairs up.

‘...It’s quiet. There’s no sign of a person at all. Now we’ll just have to open the lock and reveal whatever’s hidden inside.’

And as he braced himself once again,

“...Alright, it’s open.”

“Good job!”

Gael tapped the ranger’s shoulder while raising a quiet cry of joy.

With this, they could finally get into the secret basement.

“Right, as usual, we’ll break in along with the vanguard going ahead. Hey, pass him the lamp. You’ll have to be able to use magic, right?”

“Yeah, got it.”

After he confirmed that the mage had already passed the lighting magic tool to the ranger and had equipped his cane once again. Gael exchanged a nod with the other party member, the heavy warrior. As the lock was affixed on the door, he didn’t think that there was anyone inside, but just in case.

The heavy warrior put his hand on the door. Gael stood in preparation in any chance of surprise attack.

Later, the door was slowly pulled open. Along with that, the cold air from inside increased in strength even more.

“Well then, be it a demon or a snake...”

*TL Note: Be it a demon or a snake (鬼が出るか蛇が出るか) is a proverb, it means there’s no telling what trouble may lie ahead, let’s just go with it anyway.*

The secret that was tightly concealed by the noble who had never run out of strange rumours in regard of him. From the outside, it was already clear that there was a strange atmosphere about the room. Whatever came out wouldn’t be much of a surprise—

“HIIIIH!?”

The ranger screamed out of surprise.

His voice was loud, but Gael couldn’t blame him.

Even Gael, for when he saw that,

“C, corpse...!?”

There was a dismantled corpse.

It was hung on a hooked rope that was affixed to the ceiling, exposing its peony-coloured content of flesh and muscle to the dark empty space.



There was no stretch from it. However, there was a faint mingled smell of iron and blood that filled their nasal cavities.

The corpse was fresh.

No, if he were to look closer, there were several of these lump of meats hanging in the back, swinging around.

“This is cruel...”

“A, as I thought, the rumours were true... That nobleman really is a ‘Slave Murderer!’”

The heavy warrior groaned as the ranger cowered.

Gael’s mouth was involuntary seized as well.

“What horrible things... Look, blood’s still flowing from all of them! I didn’t even notice the smell back then, until the door’s opened!”

“This, this isn’t something humans do! For him to kill them like animals!”

“...Hm?”

When he heard the ranger’s words, Gael felt that he caught on to something.

“Kill them. like animals?”

“Errr, leader...”

The mage who had kept his silence opened his mouth in embarrassment.

“Isn’t this beef, like, for cooking?”

“Eh?”

Gael picked up the lighting tool that the ranger had dropped, and then tried to illuminate the hanging lump of meat once again.

“Ah... now that you say it, it does indeed look like that.”

After Gael had taken a better look at it, it was too large to be a human's carcass. It did look like a dismantled corpse, but it was clear that it was far too wide and too thick to be a human's. Perhaps it was like the mage had said, it was that of a cow's.

The lump of meat appeared all of a sudden, illuminated by a scanty light. And then there was the prejudice caused by the shady rumours regarding Viscount Oubeniel. Combine the two concepts, and then of course they'd first thought that the lump of meat they saw was a dismantled human body.

"...Shit, we've done it now. So this place is a food storage?!"

"Ha, hahahaha... just for how many years have we been adventurers again?"

"Sh, though I'm not much of a C-rank, did I really just scream at the sight of beef?"

"Well, what to say."

The mage, the only one who remained calm a while back, gave Gael and his men – who lost their guts at the sight of a mere piece of a hanging beef and was now being frustrated for it – comforting words.

"Anyone would be surprised to find a bleeding lump of meat just beyond a door they had to struggle open. Besides, for a mere food storage, it was too tightly locked, and they had a former adventurer to guard this place, right? Perhaps, there may be something hidden here."

"I see. Certainly this level of security should mean that something's here."

He convinced himself that it was the case before he stepped into the food storage... It was really cold, after all. The interiors of the storage were filled with cold air. As if they were in the mountains during winter. They did know that, because they had hunted monsters several times in the wintry mountains.

"Come to think of it, you said something about feeling a force of mana here, right?"

"I did. I can feel mana from the back of this storage."

"Alright, let's go."

Pushing their way through the forest of closely hung upside-down meat, they found

another door at the back of the storage. It had no locks attached to it. Though even Gael, whose senses weren't as good as the mage, could feel that there was an extraordinary amount of mana emanating from it.

The "Green Squad" assumed the vigilant stance that they had just taken a while back.

This mighty force of magic had a strange chill about it. Perhaps they had some kind of a powerful magical beast that could manipulate ice. If that was the case, and if he had kept it without the royal permission, then that would mean it would be considered an act that threatened the stability of the kingdom, and he would be subject to a punishment. It'd surely be the evidence that would take hold over the viscount's fate, just like what their client had wanted. However, if there were indeed one beyond the door, then it would be dangerous for a person who stepped in the first.

"Listen well, we don't know what will jump out at us, alright? Be absolutely vigilant."

"Yeah, got it, leader."

And then, the door was opened.

"NMUH!?"

Cold air that couldn't be compared with the one before was blowing out from it.

'Cold. What is this? Is this the magical beast's frozen breath? No, it's too strange for this to be that.'

"C, C, C, COLD! WHAT THE HECK IS THIS!?"

"Trap? Magic attack? Or perhaps, frozen breath?"

"No, this is..."

The mage stepped into the room while shielding himself from the current of cold air with his robe.

"Hey, stop it! Don't just carelessly go ahead!"

Even though he was feeling really uncomfortable, he'd still have to rebuke his rear guard who was projecting on ahead.

Though, the mage still wouldn't stop and went into the room.

While bearing the cold that was so chilling it made his upper and lower eyelashes seem to stick together, Gael glanced at back end of the room beyond the door.

"This is..."

There was some sort of a magic device. An elaborate phosphorescent magic circle emitting bluish-white light was drawn all over the room's floor. On top of which, shining jewels which regularity could never be understood by outsiders were lined up. Supposedly, they constantly generate a sort of magic when combined.

'Is this... the thing the Viscount wanted to hide?'

"Hey! Wh, what's this magic circle!?"

"Please wait, I'll analyse it right now!"

The mage said as he squatted down beside the magic circle.

"This is... what the... The construction of this circle is so precise it's almost unbelievable..."

He grunted and grumbled to himself while occasionally chanting spells to analyse its system. The mage was examining the device in a trance. The source of the cold air and the air current was that magic circle, so of course his whole body had to suffer those things, but he didn't seem to care.

"Just do something already! I'm, I'm going to freeze to death!"

"Just hold on, I'm feeling the coldest here!"

"Liar! You're a mage, aren't you supposed to be the most resistant!?"

As they exchanged those words, the analysis, which had taken well about ten minutes, was concluded.

'First, he should return to the food storage so we can have this door closed. If we keep this door open any longer like this, the interior of the residence would seem to return to the midwinters.'

“Co, coldcoldcoldcoldcold.....”

“So, what was that? Was it a prototype of a dangerous magic weapon or something?”

“Ah, that, huh. It was something ridiculous.”

At the mage’s way of speech, expectation and anxiety were welling up in the same time.

Something ridiculous.

If he’d go that far in his remarks, it must’ve been some sort of a supertech product that would be far beyond them who weren’t well-versed in magic.

They swallowed their breath and waited for the continuation of the mage’s reply.

“— It was just a device to cool the temperature down and generate air current.”

““Huh?””

At that frosty tone, all three of them, save for the mage, were dumbfounded.

“That magic circle was indeed composed of a terrifyingly advanced technology and a bunch of expensive materials, but its only function is to ‘continuously generate cold and air current for as long as possible’. Good grief, what a ridiculous thing. Here it’d be proper to say that it was a terrible waste.”

“What, what the hell with that? Why would the Viscount put something like that in his basement!? It was strictly guarded to that extent!”

Gael inadvertently let out a loud voice. It was an unseemly sight for a leader of a party in a secret investigation quest. But who can blame him? They had swept through the entire residence and when they thought that they had finally caught on to something hidden, it turned out to be merely a crap of a tech and material waste. And now the result of the quest of which the future of his party hangs upon was nothing more than a waste.

Probably everyone could understand that feeling as well, so no one tried to blame Gael.

The mage continued his remarks,

“I told you didn’t I? It was composed of valuable materials. The lines of the magic circle was drawn with molten silver, serving as its power source are genuine and highly-pure crystals. The device used an abundant amount of it. Perhaps it’s the most expensive thing inside this mansion?”

‘Besides’, said the mage as he pointed at one of the hanged meats.

Drops of water were dripping from the meat, as if it was sweating like when it was alive.

“If you look at it closely, you’ll see that the meat seems to have become softer and somewhat wet, isn’t it? It was frozen until a while ago. We opened this storehouse’s door and cold escaped from this room, so it’s thawing now. Perhaps the device was meant to keep meat fresh by freezing them?”

“It was to preserve meat, you say...”

“N, now that you say that, I did think that there’s way too much fresh-looking meat here...”

“Oh, blimey, this amount of meat will go bad before it’s completely consumed. So to avoid that...”

The heavy warrior touched the meat with his hand, and indeed they felt softer compared to when they were pushing them about to pass through a while earlier. Why in the world did he not notice it when he touched them earlier? Or was it perhaps because it was his first time seeing raw beef that wasn’t dry-preserved?

“So is that it? All those heavy security the viscount placed here was just for meat? So that the cold air wouldn’t escape the room to keep the meat from thawing, and so that thieves who’d go about looking for stuff wouldn’t break the device?”

“...That way of thinking is just natural though.”

‘Unfortunately so’, said the mage while casting his gaze downwards.

What were they supposed to say? The secret that they had uncovered with their utmost best was only that.

A pointless high-grade piece of garbage to indulge a gluttonous peculiar young noble's wish to eat fresh meat anytime he'd want it. That was all there is that they could find.

"But there's no way for that to be the end of it right? After all, it's that Oubeniel, you know? It's the corrupt noble who got himself the nickname, 'Slave Murderer', right? More, this... surely he's hiding secrets that are more sinister than this, isn't he? There must be one, right? Right?"

"Eh, em, right. You're right. There's still time until dawn, so let's look around for a bit more."

The mage responded to the quivering Gael, but from the way he spoke, it was clear that he wasn't expecting any results.



The next day.

Taking the horse carriage prepared by House Oubeniel, Gael and his "Green Squad" were on their way back to the capital.

The atmosphere in the carriage was heavy. The man that they had escorted as their apparent official request was being resentful for that the investigation that was carried out by the "Green Squad" didn't produce a decent result, and his mouth hadn't been saying anything from some time ago. Well, Gael was thankful for that. After hearing a tirade of verbal abuse immediately after the report, he felt that his body couldn't bear much more as well. If it was possible, he'd like the man to shut his mouth until they got back to the capital.

(...At any rate...)

Gael glanced at the man he escorted. Then he imagined the figure of the Count behind him.

The result of their investigation on Tullius Shernan Oubeniel determined that the man was exceedingly nearly innocent on all counts. Their late-night investigation didn't get a single speck of dirt on him, and the poor security conversely left a good impression on them. They couldn't think that he was plotting something dark in the shadows. Of course, that is, unless he was doing something outside the residence, then that would

be a different story altogether.

And his older brother was trying to affix a crime upon him in a frenzy. In Gael's imagination, it couldn't help but to give him an image that he wasn't superior, though not so much, compared to his younger brother.

(Rather, the notorious younger brother seems to be better than him.)

The nobleman known as the "Slave Murderer", pondering it over upon the result of his investigation, didn't seem to be someone who could do something so outrageous like that at all. While he was born as the second son to a count house, and while he did receive a peerage as a viscount, it seemed that he wasn't unacquainted with the common sense of the aristocracy. And thinking about the two famed adventurers that he enlisted into his service, being separated from the job for so long, the first had already wilted away, while the second was in the state where he could be outmaneuvered by them, who were C-ranked. Also, during the banquet, contrary to his notoriety, he went as far to lose his face just to help a slave who was being picked into a quarrel by a guest. And when they had thought that he was rigorously hiding something, it was actually just a meat storage.

In the end, it was hard to think of him as anything but a simple young lord who was ignorant with the ways of the world.

Instead, he felt that it was the older brother who was conspiring to kill his own younger brother who deserved the infamy more.

(...That's probably the case.)

While he was killing time during his long return trip, Gael was flirting with that reasoning.

The scenario would be something like this.

Even though they had already investigated into it just in case, the fact that a large amount of slaves purchased under Tullius' name went MIA was already known. But what if the one who ordered it was actually the present head of the family, the older brother, Linus himself?

So the older brother had the younger brother buy a slave, and the he killed them. Besides, outsiders didn't actually know who was actually murdering the slaves in



Oubeniel's house. Though, of course the allegation of slave mass-murdering and the notoriety that came along with it would go to Tullius who went out to buy them.

Of course, this was just a musing. He had only seen Tullius Oubeniel for only one day, which was yesterday, and their relationship with Linus was limited only through the delegate who was now assuming silence before him. Their association was basically just that, so what's there to understand? He was just musing to kill time, that was all.

It was for certain that the count would not be satisfied with the findings from this quest. After all, there was not a single piece of evidence that would point to his younger brother's mismanagement that he longed so much for. And that was saying nothing about them finding no evidence that perhaps would prove the rumour of his "slave-murdering" vice. On the contrary, the slaves working in the residence were dressed in fine attire and were well-educated, and they were treated better than in most places. Hence the ridiculous theory he came up with..... In any case, the Count would never put their trust in them who had failed to grasp Viscount Tullius' weakness.

(On the contrary, maybe it was for the best.)

Strangely, there was no disappointment in Gael's heart.

Now that he had thought it over, while it was a bit late, being a spy under a nobleman's control was too much of a burden for them. This time, if the opposing party were to actually possess the war potential that was mentioned in the preliminary information, then the "Green Squad" wouldn't be able to get away with it. The reason that Gael was able to investigate all the way there and still was able to return in one piece was because the other party was the relaxed son of a distinguished house and his similarly relaxed army.

As he thought about that, he was beginning to feel that his earlier self who wished to be associated with the Count was a fool.

Say that they did manage to obtain the position in the veteran seat under the Count's direct command as he had wanted earlier, would their retained need to brave dangers disappear? Though if they had to escape several jaws of death before they really lost it, that'd be fine as well.

If things were to go well after that, would they have a chance to be appointed as

regular vassals, eh? Just what exactly could he expect from an uncompassionate person who'd harbour an intention to kill his own brother? And even if they did get themselves appointed, it would mean that they'll be coworkers with this unlikable delegate in front of him. He didn't think they'd make a good fit for that.

After all, they were still adventurers. Monsters were supposed to be their opponents and the labyrinths in the mountains and the fields were supposed to be their place to be. They'd never fit in the dark side of the society where they'd be up against nobles, like, for example, in a scene of a secret feud.

(Once we get back to the capital, shall we reestablish our roots and do some adventuring?)

He would have to return to the days when they'd have to scramble for requests against their fellow men in trade and fight monsters for living, and while that road had been tough, at least it was a familiar one. Rather than beginning to row for another course at this late hour, it'd be better for him to earn honest money in the path familiar to him.

And if they were to keep saving money little by little, surely they wouldn't miss a meal in their old age as well.

Gael allowed himself to be convinced of that.

As he thought of that, he took a glance at the view outside through the rear window.

The residence of Tullius Oubeniel had now disappeared beyond the horizon. There worked the "Silver Wolf", who had to lower her head before that middle-aged noble and couldn't resist even when her buttocks were being groped. And the sight of her during these--- it was as if she was a different person from what she was during her time in the capital. However, he felt that she had become more human-like than what she was then. People wouldn't believe this, and they would keep jabbering as always, but that place was indeed where she had found her peace. Gael believed that there certainly was a day when the monster who had been dubbed as the cursed silver wolf had returned to be a human before one realised it.

That shoddy "Two-Handed Sword" might have been eaten by rust as he submerged himself in such lukewarm waters. Although he couldn't seem to be able to get used to that way of life, his was a precious, ordinary life he wouldn't want to intrude.

‘Being in a line of work where I may have to destroy those things, that’s definitely a no-no for me. When I get back, let’s make a new start as proper adventurers once again.’

So Gael thought as he left himself to the sways of the carriage.



“Aaah, I’m tired... I really can’t get used to this, good grief.”

After I sent out the last carriage and sent home all of the guests, I let out a forceful sigh.

Alongside those words were,

“Yes, my utmost gratitude for your hard work, Your Excellency.”

Something along those lines, which Victor said without moving a muscle of his face.

I suppose he’s glad because he made me feel weak, because I had to put up with various things that he did however he liked. What a terrible vassal. So I thought, when I have the chance, let’s thoroughly alter his brain tissue once again.

“For the time being, I don’t want to do this anymore, this kind of ceremonious job, I mean.”

“I am of the same opinion. We’ll leave this for a while, in the meantime, let’s have you properly learn the practices of the court——”

“Please spare me the joke...”

I waved my hands fluttering as I find myself walking in the corridor of the new residence.

Accompanying me are Uni, who has been attending me from behind ever since the start, and Due, who doesn’t seem to know what to do with his hands.

“Well then, I’m going back to my research. I can entrust the residence to you, yes?”

“Certainly. But please return to do your official duty tomorrow.”

Damn you Victor, you just had to be cranky until the very end huh.

Due laughed at that sight.

“Hey, hey, Milord. Are you letting the tool say that much? Don’t you feel he’s out of the line?”

“Please stop. Everything is due to the Master’s mercy.”

“Well, if he didn’t have the degree of freedom to say that, he wouldn’t be able to remonstrate me for my oversight.”

I’m on my way to the lab. I’m heading to the eastern wing of the first floor, a passage which is a basement for food storage is there, on paper.

When we’re about to approach the stairs, Due shrugs,

“But still, what a terrible farce you had me do there, hey.”

“Farce? You mean, sleep-feigning?”

What he talked about was something from last night.

My brother’s delegate had brought an adventurer’s party under the pretext of them being his escort. During the time when they were running about here, I purposely overlooked them to do the former.

“Well, my reason to join hands with you was because I had wanted to fulfill a prideful life as a swordsman, though...”

‘And because I had to do that, that bunch made light of me’, complained Due.

Ah, how petty. For a man his stature, it appears that he had some woman-like qualities in him too. See, even Uni seems to react with disgust.

“What are you talking about? You’ve agreed to exchange your everything for Master in exchange for your life.”

“Yeayea, rightrightright. My bad.”

Due said groveringly. Well, I suppose I'll have to patch things up here.

"Well, isn't it fine? Against an opponent who couldn't even see through your feigned sleep, it doesn't matter how much they sneered at you. What's important here is the safety you had brought in exchange for that one sneer."

"Wait. Was just doing that really worth that much?"

"Of course."

I said as I descend the stairs.

"According to what Uni said, it seems that those people also were alarmed about you. By having them see you and letting them think that you weren't much of a big deal, the effectiveness of this plan rises as well."

"Even when it's by chance only, we were fortunate to have them misjudged me by their own volition."

Uni said.

I see that it was a good thing to have those adventurers around when I lent Uni a helping hand when she was being sexually harassed by the old nobleman and wasn't resisting him for it. This way, they have now undervalued her as being "weakened".

Oh wow, talk about a severe case of jumping to hasty conclusions.

After all, Uni was still in her early teens when she was living in the capital. She's still as deadpan now as she was at that time, but she was a lot sourer then, and she did have several cases of going into unexpected rampages. To the point that we'd occasionally have a number of the guild's staff come running into the old residence.

Her mental stability is more of a recent thing. She's not weakened--- it's not like a case of a once wild kid gone quieter, it's more like she grew calmer as she matured. For them to be mistaken about her, it's just an unusual blunder for veterans that seems to be in their later thirties. The fact that she serves me with joy has, as you know, always been the way she is in the first place. And for them to think that she'd have her specs down when her mood changed a little--- I don't make my "masterpieces" in such a lax manner..... Well I don't know about Charl, though.

It's probably that, right? A wishful thinking born from the desire of wanting their mission to go well, I suppose?

And because they stood apart from Uni, they couldn't hear what we were talking about there as well. They were mainly distracted by Uni, but, the ability of the mass-produced slaves were on par with C to B ranked adventurers as well. While this would depend on the individual, some of them were more skilled than the "Green Squad". They also had a reasonable level of a ranger's skillset. If it's only eavesdropping on people who's talking in small voice because they're being careful of their surroundings, then they can do that too. So when they were being busy going about in the residence, the slaves that I had placed here and there had already caught the contents of their conversation.

By the way, Uni could hear them clearly as well. The ranger's skills that the mass-produced slaves possessed was originally the detuned version of Uni's data. As she was the original owner of those skills, of course her accuracy to attentively listen would be far more superior.

Well, if they were to find the place where I'm hiding things, I might as well put an act that will perfectly hide the thing they're looking for.

"The location of the entrance to the new lab is the information that needs to be kept confidential. If we want to hide it well, then it's best to relax the opponent's investigation first. So first, I purposely let the other party to investigate however they wish, but don't let them grab the only one fatal information. With that, the person in charge of the investigation will judge that the entrance of the lab is not in the residence."

This is the initial route of the plan.

There's this word of wisdom, "a loach caught by chance under a willow". It means that if you caught a loach once, you won't find another one in the same spot. It is a proverb that warns against holding on to one-time success and good luck. My plan is exactly the reverse. Say that a person arrives at a spot under a certain willow with great pains, but what if there's no loach to see there? Of course they wouldn't think to search the willow. If they want the loach, then they would be better off looking somewhere else.

That's what I aimed for. No matter how well you conceal something, people may still find it if they look for it over and over again. Then make people lose their motivation

when they get to the place where the thing's concealed. Let them tumble for a loach under the willow as much as they want, and let them conclude that there's no loach there. However, even if I show them the way in, I'm tightly holding the thing they're looking for.

"And on top of that, in order to give some credibility to the result, we have to make people in our side look completely incompetent. If the information they have is taken from a dim-witted opponent, then they'd think that the information is absolutely true... It was a splendid plan, Master."

That's how it goes.

It is said that the time when people are most likely to be deceived is when they are looking down on their opponent. When trying to trick someone, a person who's under the impression of something along the lines of "I won't be tricked by cheap tricks" would be in fact the easiest to trick. And thus, act as foolish as possible, and let them search a residence that has been sterilised of evidence (or rather, it's a new residence, so there's not much proof to go around). If their assessment of this side is that low, then there's no reason for them to doubt their findings.

And that goes even to my brother, who's behind the ones investigating me this time. He must've regarded me as someone dangerous already, but he doesn't think I'm smart. After all, I haven't been able to learn things like the common sense of the aristocracy and all that stuff.

Because he thinks that I've only had a basic education with me, his assessment of me should be pretty low.

I wonder: what would that brother of mine think when he finds out that they didn't find anything even after they've investigated?

The best case scenario is, he would conclude that I've grown calmer, and with that he'd retract his intention to kill me. It would be a great help for me if I could have my enemies lessened... Well, considering his character and the emotions he's holding onto, the chances of that are slim.

I suppose that the successful part here is that my brother will think that I'm holding my secrets outside my residence and his next investigations will be thrown off from now on. While the other party is wasting their resources, like time and personnel, I

can do whatever I want here.

The worst thing that can happen is that he saw through my acts and with that he'd send another party to investigate the residence... Though, figuring out the mechanism of the lab's entrance will not be an easy task. In the first place, the plan that tricked those adventurers was that plan that I came up with at that night. I had the confidence to do it, and Victor, who I had consulted beforehand, liked the plan well too, so that was the first thing in my mind. At most, let's hope my brother and the old marquis would look for the lab's entrance outside of the residence.

...However, my favourite thing here is how the lab's entrance is concealed.

I quickly unlock the key and open the door to the food storehouse. A huge amount of cold air spews out from the door.

"Well then."

I take out the communication tool from my chest and bring it closer to my mouth.

"Drei, bring the entrance to us."

"Affirmative, Master."

At that moment, they were changes happening in the interiors of the storage

Zap, zap, violet lightning glowed in the air, and at the centre of the electric discharge, the deflected space began to twist. And from twisting, space-time fine particles of colours gushes out with a furious momentum from another dimension. And then eventually it formed a solid shape in this dimension.

— It's an altar.

At a glance, it is shaped like a cauldron, supported by metal legs. And what it supported was engraved with complex and precisely-carved magic circles.

On its rim Drei shallowly sits. As soon as she finished her transition spell, she descended from there and bows.

"As Master have ordered, I have brought what you requested here."



“Yes, thank you.”

“...Just how did you come up with the idea of hiding things this way?”

Due gazed at the “entrance” that Drei had brought and muttered amazedly.

“What are you talking about? One of the factors when I thought of this was a remark of yours, though?”

“Eh? Me?”

Amazingly, he seems to have forgotten about it.

Good grief, if I have to make another large-scaled augmentation next time, should I tamper with his memory region a bit more?

“Didn’t you say to me when we were getting back from the mountain mine, ‘Such a convenient thing, huh, this transition magic is’?”

‘Did I say something like that?’, he said as he tilted his head in contemplation. Ah, dear me, he had more or less done a meritorious service to the plan’s creation, but it seems that he wasn’t aware of it.

This is the idea that I came up using his remarks as an inspiration.

First, the distance between the new lab and the basement of the new residence. I made it so that I can come and go between the places in an instant. By using transition magic, the physical distance can be substantially ignored.

However, if I had to use transition magic every time I come and go, no matter how large the caster’s mana pool is, it will never be enough to do so. In addition, the amount of mana consumed by the spell depends on the distance it has to cover and the amount of mass it has to transport, so it will be difficult to bring in large-scaled materials and bodies for experiments.

Hence, the answer to that is this cauldron-shaped altar.

It’s one of a pair of large magic tools that connects the user to the other by using transitional magic— I named it “Portal Gate”. In other words, it is a teleportation device that connects a specific point in space with another determined point.

Although the start and end points of the transition are limited to the physical location of these pair of devices, its safety is correspondingly high, and it's able to carry large-scaled materials between a considerably long distance.

And this is the entrance to my new lab.

"This was the proposal that I came up with. With this teleportation device, this "Portal Gate", it's possible to go to the lab in a blink of an eye even though it's physically far from the residence. However, if they were to search the residence and then found the device, there's the concern that they'd trespass to the lab as well, right? That's why—"

"In case of emergency, hiding the teleportation device temporarily using bonafide transitional magic is all that needs to be done. It's like a translation magic nestled in translation magic."

"— Well, that's how it is."

That's why instead of fixing the device to the floor, I made its shape to be footed instead. If the caster's mana pool is as large as Drei or Uni, then they can take the device away using transition magic, and if I have a number of the mass-produced slaves to cast the spell together, then it's possible for them to do the same thing as well. Though, on top of having to combine functionality and safety into the device, it was a struggle for me to reduce its weight so that it may be transported by teleportation magic.

If there's a weakness to it, it is that a skilled mage may detect the transition magic's residual mana from it, but... for that reason that I've installed a cooling device on its back. The device discharges mana as well, so if it's only a residue of a spell, then it'll be camouflaged right away. Since the cooling device is quite the expensive item itself, people won't find it strange that I had them tightly locked in the basement.

But, if there's a problem with that idea, then,

"Master, can we please head to the lab right away? It's, a little, you know... co, cold here."

Although she appeared in a cool manner, Drei's body is shaking all over. She's dressed in a bizarre-looking bustier and pants made of leather, and only a cloak to top it. Well, we're inside a meat freezer, she's wearing something with the degree of exposure that

can usually be found in carnivals, so of course she'd feel cold. That magic equipment was made with her opinion as a reference, and the model apparently is the conventional style of dress for dark Elven mages. For me it looks like what an evil woman boss would wear in your typical fantasy show.

The equipment was actually endowed with cold resistance, but like wearing a snowsuit in a snowstorm for a long time, you'll end up freezing anyway. It's not something you can do for long.

"Sure. Let's go right away then... I want to get on with the next research as soon as possible as well."

So I said, as I stepped onto the "Portal Gate". I proceeded to its centre and lightly made my mana flow into it. Immediately, the spell that was etched into its circuits was activated, and then it brought us to the other side.

I let the spy catch on to some nonsense. With this, the enemy side will stop their movements for awhile. In the meantime, I must proceed with my own preparations as much as I can.

Of course, that includes the research for my long-desired immortality as well.

There's just a lot of things I have to do.

# Chapter 18

## Soul-Mixing

What lied on the other end of the “Portal Gate” was a cavern.

Although the light source wasn't a problem thanks to the magic lighting tools hanging on the wall, the damp and dusty stagnant air and the exposed bare rock that was the cavern's floor made this place more of a mining tunnel rather than an alchemist's lab.

Well, truth be told, in a sense that view is correct, though.

“Still, I don't see how humans can live comfortably in this place...”

“I personally don't mind at all. However, since there's the risk that this place may adversely affect Master's health, it's indeed a bit worrisome.”

I have already visited this place several times before, but Uni and the others still hold unfavourable views regarding the place. Though, since I was putting emphasis on the convenience and the concealed nature of the place, of course the environmental aspects had to be disregarded in exchange.

By the way, Drei says,

“There are some among my clansmen who do live underground, but their dwelling aren't as damp and as dusty as this... Dwarves, though, might have a different idea of this.”

And, as I thought, she isn't a fan.

“Well, even for me, this isn't an environment where I can engross myself in research with a good mood. If the opportunity arises, shall I make some improvements around here?”

“Yeah, by all means, please do that. After all, in an emergency, this place is supposed to be the last bastion right? If many people were to be crammed into this place, I'd suffocate.”

“Only superior units like us would feel so. When it comes to that, you’ll just have to put up with it. The slaves don’t have the capacity to be dissatisfied, right?”

“As a matter of fact, that is not true.”

Uni raised an objection against Drei’s careless remarks.

“While the mass-produced slaves indeed have had their emotions restricted, their emotions itself still exist. Too much accumulated stress will have a negative impact on their body and mind. Like what happened to M-03 in the past.”

‘Yeah’, Due said, his face sour. It was a story from last year, when a slave put down her brother whom she had reunited with by chance due to his hostility factor against me. And due to the stress from having slain her own kin, the individual fell into an extreme panic.

It was when he just had become my “opus”. I do remember that well. As Uni said, although the mass-produced slaves are robot-like in nature, in order to maintain their autonomy, a reasonable amount of emotions still has to be kept in place. Though, I also keep their appearance neater than the slaves in some other places and provide them with top-quality meals in order to maintain their mental stability.

**TL Note:** “*Masterpiece*” will be translated as “*Opus*” from now on.

Besides, compared to the superior units – the “opus” series, they are physically weak. If I leave them in an unsanitary environment for a long time, they might fall ill and collapse. Should the worst happen, I’m confident that I can cure them of most diseases if I treat them. But compared to symptomatic treatments, striving for prevention costs less. Besides, it would be troublesome if I, however small the chance might be, were to contract their illness too.

“It is as she said. I have established a shift-system for the mass-produced slaves that I have assigned to work here, to be periodically replaced by those from the main residence outside. However, this isn’t much of a profound solution. Hence, I believe that improvements on the environment here indeed is a necessity.”

Moreover, the environment may affect the bodies for my experiments as well. That might impair the reliability of the data that I’ve gathered with great pains too.

“Hum... I was being imprudent. I’ll be careful from now on, Master.”

‘Don’t mind it’, I replied her with a wry smile and move on from the topic.

“Anyway, let’s talk about the future. This lab is different from those tiny basements in my residence in the capital and that former deputy’s manor in Marlin. Rather, this place is a yet-to-be-completed secret base.”

Secret base. Even though it is something I have said myself, the words are so childish it made me want to laugh.

However, it tickles my motivation and something that seems to be excitement echoes somewhere inside of me.

I recognise myself as a man of efficiency, but I’m not enough of an adult to hold this romance in disdain entirely. Otherwise, surely I’d give up a preposterous dream like attaining immortality a long time ago. It’s just right for an alchemist to be somewhat childish.

I thought as such, when,

“Well, well, welcome back Master! I’ve waited an eternity for your return!”

Charl, who I kept here to look after the place, cheerfully greeted me. Drei’s a dark elf, but with a collar attached to her, if people were to discover her then at worst I can defend her by claiming that she’s merely my slave. But the same defence won’t do for him, who’s a vampire... and moreover, a lord class vampire. After all, he’s an extremely dangerous entity who’s able to conquer a small country just by increasing his kin. Even as a slave, he’s still mankind’s natural enemy whose existence cannot be tolerated even for a second. And that’s why he basically is kept in this lab in secret.

“Aah, here comes the annoying one...”

“I’m back, Charl. So, what’s changed while we were away?”

Charl ignores the weary-looking Due and answers my question.

“Ah, yes. I tried the experiment you asked me to perform. The result isn’t really satisfactory though—...”

‘Haa’, he sighed in a way that fits his young nobleman appearance.

As this vampire’s spirits fluctuates in an extreme manner, seeing as he’s down like this, it seems the results are quite bad.

“Well, if all experiments yield success, then the word ‘experiment’ doesn’t have a meaning. It’s fine to make the best of the data from the failure in the next experiment. By the way, can you show me how it turned out?”

“Yes... then, this way, Oubeniel-kun.”



“Aa, aa, Aaa, aaAAa...”

A sitting man, whose body is covered in patches, is rambling while gazing hollowly at the empty air. There’s no meaningful words coming out from his mouth.

He looks like a zombie, but the truth is that the man’s actually alive. In addition, his brain is also functioning normally, medically speaking. Unlike the experiment that I did in the academy, here I didn’t intentionally damage any of his brain functions.

With a ghastly look on his face, Due points at the man.

“Milord, the heck’s this?”

“A test subject. For a resuscitation experiment.”

“Whoa.”

Drei leaked as she flutters her eyes. Surely she’s greatly surprised. After all, bringing dead men back falls more into the ‘miracle’ category rather than ‘magic’ territory. Necromancers may turn the living into the undead, but they can’t revive the dead as living human beings that they originally were. ‘A once-dead person regains life’, such a thing can only be found in the scriptures of the Church.

“If I’m not mistaken, the subject of this experiment is to restore a post-mortem body by having its preserved soul to repossess it... right?”

“Yes, that’s correct. Theoretically, when the soul establishes itself in the body, then the body should be resurrected, but...”

His body was kept intact without damage, and in addition to that, we’ve got all of the final parts – twenty-one grams of the so-called ‘soul’. With these components, he should’ve returned as he was, as a human, but...

After all, if this is about reviving a dead man by inserting their soul into a living body, then I’ve got an example. That is example is none other than me. I died one in the previous world, and then was reborn in this world. All of my memories and my personality was kept intact, and I’m still alive for almost twenty years here. If this experiment were to follow the preceding example, then this man—- who now can’t do anything but to groan, should have regained his senses, he should’ve been hurling abuses at us, and he should’ve been frightened by our presence, for we had already killed him once.

“Let’s hear your opinion on this, then, Charl.”

“Suure... But before that, may I kill this sample once again? In order to explain what happened, I will have have another look on the condition of his soul too.”

“Sure, permission granted.”

Before I get to finish my words, Charl had already promptly robbed the life from the experiment material once again by a chant-less instant death spell.

With a thud, the body that has become a genuine corpse once again lies back on the bed. Charl grabs the soul that came out from the poor man (which is basically invisible to living beings), and then he casts some sort of a spell to make the soul visible to me.

“...As I thought. The size of this soul is clearly small. Even though his brain tissues that were responsible for memory storage and emotion are kept as they were, there’s no information content in this soul.”

“Which means, the soul didn’t establish itself in the body?”

The hypothesis that the cognition of the brain affects and changes one’s soul has already proven in previous experiments. I already did the experiment on this, ad nauseam, with Charl in the academy. Then in this case, the soul didn’t establish itself well enough in the body, and for that it couldn’t receive any information from the brain,



and the soul complied with that condition and turns hollow, I suppose?

However, Charl shakes his head.

“No, that’s not it, Master. If that was the case then he wouldn’t be able to move as he were, but in addition to that his status as a corpse should’ve remained intact. He shouldn’t be able to groan like, ‘aaaah’, ‘uuuh’, like that. And I have certainly placed the soul into this empty body in a way that it should’ve moved again as a normal human.”

“...Hm. If that’s the case, then I suppose I should surmise that some problems happened because the subject’s soul was placed into an empty body?”

I ordered Charl to put the soul inside the body once again. Since Uni has been casting recovery on the body since a little while ago, its decay, including of the brain, should be minimal. If there’s no kind of loss on the soul, then he should return to the state a while ago.

Then, what’ll happen now? The subject convulses once, before it finally ceases to respond like a living being. I take his arm to check his pulse, but there isn’t any..... He’s completely dead.

“This is...”

“Impossible..... his soul, it’s gone!? This can’t be! There shouldn’t be any mistake in my spell!”

“You sure? So this isn’t caused by a mistake in the process?”

“No, I believe that possibility is minimal. I couldn’t find any deficiencies in the spell’s configuration.”

“Yes... we’re not experts in death magic, but we didn’t see anything in the spell that would cause abnormal results to occur.”

This is unexpected.

Could it be that a damage will occur on the soul if it’s inserted into a soul-less body? Well then, why was it possible for me to reincarnate? My soul was supposed to

disappear, like what happened to the soul that entered the subject's body. What was the difference between this subject and me? Was it because from the viewpoint of this world, my soul came from another world? Was that the root cause? Well, that would be plausible, but there's no solid evidence to back this hypothesis, and the only sample I have to research this is me alone. This isn't a hypothesis that I can trust completely.

Then...

"So a soul dissipates when it's inserted into a soul-less body, and when the process is repeated, it'll completely disappear in the end. Then... what happens when a soul is inserted into a body that already has a soul?"

Due startledly shifted his gaze on me at my murmurs. I pay him no mind and continue my thoughts.

How does this theory sound? Let's go with my example, for some reason my soul reached this world and entered into this Tullius Shernan Oubeniel's body. When I possessed this body, the original owner was still a baby. Considering that the soul wasn't mature, what happened then? Was there any sort of loss that occurred to a soul due to the possession which got supplanted by another soul?

"That sounds interesting! Let's do that, by all means, let's do that! Let's do that right now!"

"How come did you get so eager with that kind of experiment..."

As I thought, Due would be critical of an experiment that involves tampering with someone's living body or someone's soul like this. Well, this is what it means to have a diversity of opinions. If I were to make everybody a yes-man that'd agree to everything I say, my ideas and tactics would eventually get ossified. That's why I won't repudiate this aversion of his. Nevertheless, I do limit what I imbibe, though.

At any rate, Charl has quite changed too. In the past, be as it may that this sort of experiment would develop his skills as a necromancer, he used to detest this. Is this change caused by his brain augmentations, or is this caused by him turning into an undead?

"Then, I'll bring the slaves that will serve as the sample."

"Yes, please do Uni. Well, then, what to do in this case...?"

While seeing her off as she's leaving the room to bring some experiment materials, I muse with numerous hypotheses.

Though, considering my own example, there's one strong theory.

Well, well, well, then?



Speaking of the results, the experiment isn't successful.

However, the experiment does end up with quite the interesting results.

"Uh, a, A, AAAAAAH! WH, WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!? S, SOMEONE. THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE OF ME!?"

Slave B, who has the dead Slave A's soul inserted in him, falls into a state of panic as soon as the operation was performed on him. The influx of information from Slave A's soul couldn't be integrated and that may have caused confusion in him.

"Ooh, this is interesting, Oubeniel-kun! The souls are vying for control, they rampage as they tear and rip about! Even though they share the same body, I can see its after-effect veeeery well! AMAZING!"

Charl, who casted the spell, is in rapture. Perhaps because of his vampiric transformation, he's showing his fairly sadistic side towards this inferior opponent. To someone of the same stature as, or to someone who is superior to him, he still is a spineless man though.

"GE, GE, GET OUT! GET OUT OF ME!... No, you get out... STOP! DON'T SPEAK WITH MY MOUTH!... You, get, out..... STOP, STOP, STOOOOP!"

"From what I see, the dominant one here is the original owner of the body, is that correct?"

"Indeed! But the one's possessing him is also working hard, you know? It appears that it's eating away the original's soul and supplanting its lost parts! But I don't think it can overcome the shortage that it had from the start. At this rate, the possessing soul

will be eaten by the original soul and disappear completely! I wonder, what kind of death cry will I hear then? AHAHAHAHAHA!"

"Oh, so that means, if the original soul is the weaker one, then it's possible for the possessing soul to replace it?"

"The probability for that is high. In the next experiment, I propose a trial run on the debilitated possessed one."

"Yes. That'd be reasonable. Or if you so inclined, should we try using a baby? If the soul isn't matured enough, I suppose it'll be easier to take over too..."

Uni and Drei laid out their ideas. Drei's proposal is especially good. If the experiment is successful, then I can prove the hypothesis on the mechanism of how I got reincarnated here. Why did I come into this world particularly is another matter entirely, though.

The only one who doesn't look comfortable with this is Due. Well, in the first place, he wasn't provided with a function to help with these sorts of experiments, and his temperament isn't suited for this.

So, in the end, he opens his mouth.

"Say, Milord."

"What is it."

"...Did you go this far, just because you want to be immortal?"

That's quite a late question to ask.

"But of course? You too, didn't you take my hands because you didn't want to die?"

Anyone would want to avoid death.

Certainly, there are also people who'd think that death is better for them in this world too. And that's why the number of people who committed suicide here is too much to mention.

But here's what I think. In case where people would, from the bottom of their hearts,

think that death is better for them, it's possible that their souls are already close to dying.

When people is being driven into a corner, or when their *raison d'être* disappears, during those moments, people would wish they were dead.

But on the flipside, if none of the two conditions apply, I don't think they'd wish for death themselves. So, the death of a soul, I suppose, isn't when a soul disappears to somewhere like what happened in the previous experiment, it's when one's heart gets so broken it no longer has the will to live.

I don't want to be like that. In my pursuit of immortality, I'm also seeking a way to triumph against that soul-killing poison. I fear death so much that I don't want to deal with it, and so there's no way I want my heart that wishes that I'd avoid death to change. Simply desiring a long life, and so that to simply avoid death when the time comes – that is, turning into a vampire like Charl and then retiring somewhere, that's out of the question too. That's not enough for me, and that's why I'm doing this.

...Is that not the case for Due?

“...Knew it. I knew you were going to say that.”

He shrugged his shoulders as he said so.

“So, what's the answer to my question? You still don't want to die, even now, yes?”

“Yeah, that's right. Even now, I can't bear to die and leave things this way. I know at least that much.”

“Quite the light answer... Though if you work for me properly, I won't say anything about it.”

That's the point of this. And as long as my treatment on him is working, he will continue to work for me properly.

“Well, regarding this experiment, I do get where you're coming from, alright? It's not anything pleasant to look at, anyway.”

“Heh? Is it? I'm having so much fun, though!”

“Yes, I know already, so be quiet Charl.”

I shot at the person who interrupted without reading the mood and continued my speech.

For me, this experiment is a job. It's just a job to earn the reward that is immortal life. I'm not doing this because it's my hobby.

“If you're not comfortable with this, I don't mind if you want to sit this out. There are other kinds of experiments in the other section of the lab that may suit your liking, if you want a change of pace, you may go ahead and check them out.”

“...Sorry. I'm gonna take you up on that offer. 'Scuse me.”

Due said so as he leaves the experiment room.

At that sight, Drei gazes somewhere with a sullen look.

“He's more irresolute than I thought.”

“Are you unhappy that the one who dragged you in the first place is in that kind of predicament?”

“I don't... mean...”

Then she chews her own words as he falters. Both he and Drei are in the beginning of a romance. Well, of course there'd be at least one or two feelings that are out of the ordinary between the two.

“It's just that, I wish that he'd serve Master more resolutely...”

“Hm? Is that so you two can have more fun together?”

Even here the vampire needlessly chimed in. Sure enough, he ends up being glared scarily by the lady.

“Shut up. You want to be struck by a stake?”

“HYIH”

And so he ended up like that, just why couldn't he learn anything? His intelligence was supposed to be high.

As I find myself exasperated, Uni opens her mouth.

“*Warikiru*’, so that means there’s also the option to cast aside the rest of what one would have. While being resolute may produce good results in most conditions, in some other conditions that may not be the case. A person might cast aside something that they have and that might turn out as a mistake that they shouldn’t have overlooked, in other cases, it might be an instance of a rare luck for them—— it’s possible to confuse the two.”

**TL Note:** *There’s an element of wordplay here. ‘Warikiru’ also means dividing something so that it doesn’t have a leftover. Consider the following. Say that you have some cookies that you can’t break apart for some reason and you want distribute these cookies to another friend of yours— so there’s two of you. Say that you have four of these cookies. To warikiru here is simple, two for you, two for your friend. But what if you have three? To warikiru, you must discard the third cookie. And what Uni is trying to say here that the fact that you discarded the third cookie might turn out to be some form of a great luck (third cookie’s actually poisoned) or some sort of a terrible mistake (best cookie in the world and you threw it out). TL;DR she’s basically trying to say that Due being irresolute about this whole deal isn’t necessarily a bad thing.*

“What are you trying to say?”

“For example, take Sir Victor Lorge. What might happen if he were to be brainwashed so much so that ‘alchemy research’ became his top priority?”

At that question, Drei thinks for a bit, then answers,

“...Home affairs and negotiations with external parties, and other things that were cast away— he would end up shunning them, huh. ‘They are nothing but trifling matters’, and he’s indeed being ‘resolute’.”

“That’s correct. To some extent, if we didn’t keep a person’s nature that would continue to let him make sensible and ordinary decisions, in a closed environment like this, they will end up behaving recklessly... That was what the Master had taught me.”

“Well, well, you have learned well too, Uni. Well, Due’s sensitivity is useful in its own way.”

He’s especially useful for someone like me who’d resort to any means necessary to attain my purpose. I redirected the sentiment and loyalty of Drei from her tribe – the Dark Elves – and the clan where she was raised towards me. Of course, I’d prefer her to undividedly, resolutely, dedicate her thoughts for her lord and this group where she belongs now. But that’d mean that her line of thoughts would become inflexible, and the ability to pay some mind to how other people may see her would be reduced as well. That is not desirable.

“That reasoning... I think I can understand it.”

“That so? Then, I’ll let you sink that in..... Alright, by the way, what’s happening with the subject, Charl?”

I returned my attention to the experiment. This isn’t the place to give a self-study philosophy lecture on organisational theory. It’s a place for an alchemist to do his experiments.

“Aaah... Yes, this is no good.”

Charl threw a cold gaze at the state of the subject, in which various souls vying for control of the body have already completed the initial stage.

The subject sunk down, powerless, occasionally the subject convulses and cackles randomly.

“Ah, ehe, uhu, uhu, who? Me, who? I, who? Me, who? Who? Who? Ahi, haheahaha...”

“...Both of the souls’ self-awareness was thrown into disorder and thus his identity collapsed, huh? Well, for an experiment I just came up with a while ago, its result is quite useful.”

“While Master may be fine with this, for me this is far from satisfactory... More, he should’ve writhe in agony more as he loses himself, it’d be better if he’d go crazy like that...”



“Quite the vulgar taste you have there. That’s just going to be noisy.”

“So the ego collapses... Master, let us keep the subject alive in this state for a while, and then insert another new soul, perhaps the possessing soul will settle in well at that time.”

“Alright, I accept. Let’s put him into confinement for a while as a measure to prevent him from committing suicide. Your evil eye may tamper with his mental state and compromise the result of the experiment, so don’t brainwash him with it. Gag him so he won’t be able to bite his tongue.”

“As you have ordered. It shall be done immediately.”

As I gave Uni, who’s nimbly dealing with my orders, a sidelong glance, I record the results of the experiment. Char pokes my shoulder repeatedly.”

“Hey, hey, Oubeniel-kun. Putting aside the guy who went mad, what should I do with the corpses?”

“Hm? Ah, now that you say that, there’s that too... Charl, can you suck their blood and make them lesser vampires, and then destroy their hearts? They’ll become ash, dealing with that is easier.”

“Uegh~~~... Even though the blood of a corpse tastes real bad... Then, then! Next time, can you give me the blood of a virgin as a return? If possible, I’d like to suck it directly!”

And he puts out a request like that. Hmmm, it seems that when a virgin— man or woman— has their blood taken, there’s a tendency for them to become a powerful kin. I don’t really want them to be under Charl’s control though...

Well, I guess I can manage the number under his control regularly so it doesn’t expand too much? That way it’ll also give Charl, who’s now living in this cavern, a way to vent, and he surely needs someone to talk to. Of course, I’ll have to get several preparations ready first, though.

“Indeed... In the near future, I’ll have to buy a large number of slaves to develop the coal mine, take a cover, and I’ll leave it to your discretion as to who to buy.”

“YAH000000000000! As expected from Master, you sure understand me! I’ll do my best even more! Now that I think about it, I haven’t sucked a single virgin’s blood. The

ones I drink are cultured, and I'm strictly prohibited to lay my hands on the M-series. I mean, there's not one single virgin in the 'Opus' series—"

"...Hey."

Drei's cold voice.

"I've just dealt with Master's orders and have now returned... You were talking quite the interesting thing there, O-Four."

Now Uni too.

"A, a, a, abababababa....."

...Aaaah. I just don't know anymore. Before I got dragged into the problem, I decided to leave the lab.

There were cries of "OUCH!", "I'M SORRY!", "Ah, that actually feels a bit good, probably." from behind my back. Good grief, that room is littered with corpses, just what are they doing there?



This underground lab also functions as a mine for materials. Mined from one of the veins that Drei discovered when we were going about the territory a while ago. After consulting with Victor and the other vassals, considering the cost of infrastructure and current political condition, I've decided to abandon mining as a policy. However, as we privately dig here to set up the lab, the result was this space in the depths of this earth.

By the way, to avoid the unlikely event where an adventurer stumbles into this place, entrances into this place from the outside are securely collapsed after its insides have been excavated to a certain degree. One can only enter and leave this place through the "portal gate". The air inside can be cleaned by an exclusive magic tool (it's easy for an alchemist to separate carbon dioxide into oxygen and carbon). The waste from the mining process is recycled by converting it into a golem on the spot. Still, it's dusty and water's hard to get, so in these respects, this is still an environment where people can't live comfortably.

At any rate, this underground space will become even wider as the mining progresses.

In a way, it may be said that this is a dungeon that extends indefinitely. In the near future, if I were to be defeated politically by my older brother or a certain marquis, this is the most promising destination for my escape. I'm planning to make some improvements in that area. I plan to arrange this place's environment so this space can be completely self-sufficient at the end of the day. Well this underground lab has only been running for six months. This is just something to do much later.

While thinking about that, I turn my feet towards the mineral deposit section. Well then, how far has it been dug while I was gone?

"Well, well, Your Excellency. This place's a bit sordid, but welcome anyway. Have you come for an inspection this time?"

The one who greeted me with a blackened face is...

Uuuuuh?

"...Ah, if it isn't Laubert. Your face's covered with dirt, so I couldn't recognise you for a moment there."

"Well that's harsh. Even though you've already messed with the insides of my head so that I can admirably work like this."

"What are you saying? I don't remember augmenting you so that you'll be happy playing in dirt. Wasn't it you who offered to supervise this mine by yourself?"

When I pointed that out, with that sooty face of his Laubert lets out an embarrassed laugh.

It was himself who volunteered here 'for future reference', since he's volunteering for the official duty of copper mine development that will begin soon as well. In a mine where golems would excavate without being tired, or where they would never get mineral poisoning, surely there's not much to take here. But knowing that, with avarice he'd still be like, 'let's learn a lot', as if what he gained here will be his flesh and blood. That's probably how Jean-Jacques Laubert does things.

"Weell, anyways, this place is quite the treasure mountain! Gold and silver keeps coming out."

"Well that's quite the blatant attempt of changing the conversation. Well, whatever..."

Is there really a lot of them?”

“Well, that! At worst, what we have here is enough to cover the kingdom’s revenue for a year. Burning the documents regarding the survey was a correct decision. If you think about what’ll happen if Marquis Lavallée were to know about this——“

“Surely, no matter what he’d do then, he will handle the matter directly. If we handle it poorly, he might confiscate the entire territory of Marlin.”

‘No doubt about it’, says Laubert in a serious manner. Though this man would gladly back the marquis had he not been brainwashed. There’s also Victor too. But both are now faithful and capable talents under my control. Occasionally, there are times where they’d nag so much so that I couldn’t bear them, but I suppose that there’s some charm there too.

As I think about that matter, a golem is taking out a handcart loaded with lumps of ore. Illuminated by the light of the magic tool, reflected there were glimmers of gold and silver. Even though they’re not refined yet, in those glimmers I can still feel their magic, that magic that melts the hearts of a lot of people.

“I’ll say this again, Your Excellency.”

“Ah, I got it already. ‘Don’t circulate these outside’, right?”

“It is as you say. If you were to put gold or silver with unknown source outside, it’s only a matter of time until they track the source.”

“It’s alright, I’ll be using them for research only.”

“It’s actually a waste to do so, though. Well, however, if the situation tilts to the point where Your Excellency would wish to have the realm under your control, I suppose there’s another way to use them.”

“Spare me the joke... Even though I can finally do my research earnestly...”

“Then, please bear in mind that this situation will not last for long. With an adversary in hand, this state of equilibrium will not last for long. Considering the marquis’ age, I don’t know what he’ll try to pull before he passes.”

“This turns out to be quite the unpleasant talk. If he’s so afraid of dying, I wish that

he'd lend a hand to my research instead..."

"He won't do that even if he dies. From what I see, he's already dedicated his life to his personal belief – the centralisation of the country. Rather than to preserve himself so late into his life now, I suppose that he'd rather take the territories of the feudal lords from them until the end, be it a single field or a garden."

"Belief, huh. You can still live without them. Me, I just don't want to die, that's all."

To that, Laubert responds,

"But isn't that a form of belief too, Your Excellency?"

And so he poked fun at me. If you can call the indicator to stay alive a 'belief', then, sure.

"Anyway, it's good that everything seems to be going well. Laubert, why don't you finish up around here too and return to the residence for once. While you do have the magic tool to prevent you from being poisoned, this environment isn't suited for humans. And besides, I suppose it'd be better for you to take a bath very soon."

Since he's been in this mining site for a while now, he's dirty all over, and there's no bath installed here yet. The fact that he's been here for quite a time, to say it mildly, shows that he's quite determined, even from the sense of a Japanese who lived in the 21st century.

When he heard those words, his eyes began to shine.

"Bath! Ah, how pleasant. Indeed, the most pleasing thing from me being Your Excellency's vassal is that now I can use the bath every day!"

"If you're happy with it, then that's good."

In this era, it takes fuel to heat the baths, and even if you have hot water, fetching it is hard labour in itself. While it isn't as bad at the middle ages of my previous world as there's magic in this world which would make the process to be more labour-saving, the opportunity to take a bath is still valuable nonetheless. In case of my Oubeniel house, we keep the temperature of the warm water and remove dirt and bacteria from it with a magic tool, so the bath runs for twenty-four hours a day. If you favour cleanliness, then surely this would be an ideal place to work for you. In order to be

employed, however, it is a prerequisite to have your brain augmented first.

“Yes, but properly wash yourself before you get in, alright? As expected, it’ll be painful to remove that amount of soot and dirt from the baths.”

“Of course!”

Did he really get it? Ah, well. Laubert is an excellent official. Even if I don’t nag him about it, he should understand at least that much. He’s not a certain vampire who would forget to pay attention as to which side of the bath he should enter.

I cut my visit of the mining deposit area short and head to the other section. If there’s a problem here, surely Laubert will be the first to let me know. He’s that kind of a man.



The next place I stepped into is a wide cavern that’s a lot different than the previous places. There’s a silver-coloured lustre all over the place, since the walls and the floors are reinforced by the mined materials. The back of the walls are fixed with large suspensions in all directions, so even if a giant or a troll were to rampage inside, they won’t sway even for a tiny bit. If it comes to dragons, I’m not that confident though.

What is researched here is a bit different than the main subject of the research. This is a so-called weapon testing facility. As I am learning alchemy because I don’t want to die, I am also seeking more powerful weapons so that my opponents wouldn’t be able to kill me. But if I were to get myself to be occupied in this, the vital research on immortality would fall behind, so I basically left weapon development to the mass-produced series, with some rough instructions.

So, if one were to ask what I was doing here,

“What on earth is that?”

Perhaps when he left the experiment room a while back for a change of pace, Due ended up here. He gazes curiously at the man carrying a pipe-thing made of metal and then alternated his gaze to a scarecrow on the other side. The man is one of the military officers of the former deputy who had undergone simple brain augmentations when I seized Marlin. From the beginning he wasn’t that competent, and now due to further augmentations, his ability keeps on declining. As these people

were rendered obsolete when Victor and Laubert were appointed, I can't leave these people to be idle like that, so I have them participate in this sort of trial run.

"We will commence the thirty-fourth shooting test. Ignition, check."

After the slave-maid gave him the signal, the man who's carrying out the trial run sets a rope that's attached on the pipe on fire, presses his shoulder against the stock installed on the back of the pipe, and then he pulls the metal trigger. So, in conjunction with the metal trigger, the burning rope will ignite the loaded powder inside of the pipe. When Due thought that sparks will fly from it,

——— BANG!

Fire was blown from the tube with a roar. And as if the scarecrow was struck by something that was released by the pipe, its belly parts scatter straws about.

"...What's that tool?"

"It's a musket. As you can see, it's a tool to shoot projectiles."

A matchlock musket..... or in other words, a firearm.

The ores mined from the deposit contains a lot of sulphur, and thus with the extracted sulphur from the ores and the saltpetre collected from the feces and remains of the experimental subjects, I can make gunpowder. Well, the words 'if it's just decomposing a chemical compound, then alchemy can do it' is utterly true. And so that I could put the abundant gunpowder that I made into effective use, I tried to make this thing. Harpers... Was it? Or was it Dash, or Bosch? Well, in principle, there's also a way to make gunpowder from thin air. But well, first I should just use the materials in hand.

***TL Note:*** While I can't be 100% sure, the name Harpers, Dash and Bosch might be related to a gun or a gun prototype. Dash may refer to Degtyaryov-Shpagin. Bosch doesn't seem to be a gun name though.

So I passed the simple materials to the maids and had them make it, weeeeelll, it turned out to be easier than I thought. I believe that it isn't because our technological strength is superior, rather, it's because the technological level in this world is actually higher than I thought.

Due, who observed the musket trial, tilted his neck in bewilderment.

“That... is it really worth it to take the trouble to make something like that?”

Well, I already figured that he'd say so. For adventurers who'd already get used to dealing with monsters, muskets that can only be used to shoot only once before it must be inefficiently prepared to shoot again would seem to be a picnic in their line of work. In addition, Due is an “opus” that I've augmented, so forget muskets, he could even endure the shots of a cannon head on.

“It's not to be used against exceptions like monsters or people like you. The weapon is for war against humans.”

“War? Stop it with the jokes, Milord. You know how far an arrow from a bow can reach? If that can only reach within the distance where you can see your opponent's face, I don't see how it can exchange shots with the archers.”

He said as he waved his hands near the side of his face. Indeed, the range of a bow is surprisingly long. From what I can remember from my faint memory, it took a considerably long while for guns since its advent to surpass the range of bows and arrows.

However. The terrifying thing about a gun is not its range, nor its killing power. Well, they can't be completely disregarded, but the important point lies somewhere else.

“Due. That blockhead who used the musket a while ago. How long do you think would it take for him to hit a single target with a bow?”

I said as I pointed at the former officer who ran the trial. He's probably a good sample of how an imbecile (?) would look like.

“Him huh... Someone ordinary can use a bow in about half a year, but a dull bastard like him probably would—— hm?”

Probably Due has realised it too.

“You get it? Even he's like that, he can use the musket with only a short period of time of training. Someone ordinary would be able to use a musket after a week of training.”

Indeed, guns have a dramatically shorter training period compared to other weapons. How long would it take for someone to learn swordsmanship until it can really be useful in the battlefield? Then how about bows? Compared to those, firearms would



allow humans to kill another as quick as possible.

In the same way, among the weapons that can be used in the battlefield with a short training period is the spear. Have the soldiers carrying them line up to form a rank and they'll be useful for the time being. But while guns have shorter range compared to bows, their range is still overwhelmingly longer than spears.

"So that means, by having a number of them... all at once..."

"Yeah, do it incessantly, and the spearmen and knights won't be able to get close."

Doing something like 'one shot, one kill' can be left for the snipers with their guns of the future. The job of a musketeer, instead of making a rank to form a fence, is to shoot their weapons side by side. That alone can take down about half of the incoming infantries and cavalries. Oh, in my previous world the path of chivalry already has died out too. After you teach the peasants you conscripted how to shoot a gun, simply push with the number you have. That will allow you to suppress the battlefield.

Of course, in this world there are also mage-knights and magic beast-knights, so I don't think using guns here will go smoothly as it would in my previous world. And the strong men here couldn't be considered as normal humans at all. Nonetheless, the advantage that can be gained by using superiority in numbers is overwhelming. And the stronger individuals can be dealt after the rest of the population is scattered away. Exceptions are exceptions because there are only a few of them.

However, there's one problem.

"But... I don't think I'd want to use this weapon too often..."

"That so?"

"Yeah, the production of muskets is technically not so difficult. If someone were to pick one up in the battlefield, they will be quickly copied and spread in the whole continent."

"No no, isn't that impossible? Even if you sweep the continent for it, there's no one that has merits like the alchemists we do have here, even among countries, right?"

"You can make this even if you're not an alchemist, though?"

“...Eh?”

Due's face looks like that of a pigeon that gets hit by a peashooter. Was it really surprising?

“Muskets aren't made of mythrils or orichaliums. The tube is iron, and the bullet is lead. Heck, the stock is wooden. A blacksmith with a bit of skill can easily learn the manufacturing method. The technology to synthesise sulphur and nitrate to make gunpowder isn't that difficult. Well, above all that though, it does take money to put them into practical use. Well, rather than us, I guess the more fortunate great other forces will use it more efficiently, huh.”

It's a sad thing, but an inventor doesn't necessarily gain the greatest benefit from their inventions. The Yagi-Uda antenna is a good example. When it was initially invented, it wasn't adopted into the army's tactical ideas, while the UK and US on the other hand incorporated them into their military and won World War II. Even if the Marlin military were to adopt the musket ahead of the others, at best there's the chance that other lords would, at worst there's a risk that other countries would, produce these in great quantities and use it to overrun this place... No, that's not a risk, that will indeed happen. Marlin has only a small population. It's not a territory that can win in a battle where only numbers matter.

“I don't quite get it... But why did you make this, then? Won't it be useless that way?”

“Someday, somewhere, someone is bound to invent the musket in the future, and so this is to prepare when that time comes. If we accumulate the know-hows ahead of that, it will be easier to respond when the era of muskets as the main weapon of the battlefield comes.

That way it'll be easier to devise measure against them and to make manuals for the soldiers who just got freshly drafted. Well, it's a classic case of 'better safe than sorry.'”

The musket is still heavy, and on top of it, unsafe. But it's still better than nothing.

Besides, after the development department accumulates enough results from the production, they'll be able to develop more sophisticated firearms. If I can make flintlock muskets and breech-loading guns ahead of time, surely I'll be able to gain advantage in a battle, even against the muskets. However, in this world, there's also

this lot called dwarves that are exceptionally good at smithing. If it's them, I fear that it's possible for them to cover the technological gap and evolve their guns right away.

At the end of my line of sight, the slave-maids in charge of weapon development are inspecting the gun which has cooled down post-firing. Whether any distortions have appeared in the barrel, or if the mechanism, like the trigger, isn't durable enough—well, there's plenty to find out.

I called out to them.

"Hey, how are you people doing?"

"Master."

"Forgive us for having you witness such a disgraceful sight... the development of the musket that Master has instructed is currently progressing at a faster pace than the previous estimates."

"Indeed."

Faster than the estimates, huh. As I thought, the degree of difficulty to create this isn't that high.

...The muskets, like the silver and gold found in this mine, should not be put out to the world under present circumstances. If this gets out, the world will be rebuilt with a momentum that will be so quick that it can't be undone. If I ran out of luck and a war between countries were to happen, only then I suppose would I use this to fully cooperate with this country.

"We will submit a report of existing problems and improvement plans at a later time."

"Hm, well done. Once you're finished with this, return to the residence and have the other shift come here."

"M-06, as Master wishes."

"M-07, our gratitude to Master. Finally it's possible to bathe."

"M-08, our gratitude to Master. Keeping hygiene is a maid's duty."

It seems that they have it rough here too. Being unable to bathe puts a heavy mental strain on them, especially since they're women. Although their emotions are restricted, that degree of sensibility exists still. There's also the possibility that problems may occur in strange places if I do not let them moderately reduce their stress. Let's have none of that and let them stretch their wings for now.

"Ah, by the way. There'll be another replenishment of slaves in the near future. The plan to improve the environment of this lab should make a lot of progress by then. The day when you can take a bath while you're being stuck in here is closer than ever too."

"Truly splendid. In any case, Master, M-06 is currently interested in the bath called 'hot springs'."

"M-07, likewise. More than 90 percent of the M series is interested in 'hot springs'."

".....? From M-08 to M-06 and M-07. Query. Isn't 'hot spring' water supposed to be a beverage? M-08 have gathered that nobles would drink from hot spring for medicinal purpose."

Oh, how unexpected that it came up now. I certainly remember talking about hot springs when I was designing the bath for the residence. Well, I gave up on it since it would be so conspicuous that it might gather unnecessary attention, and there was also the problem of time constraints when the residence was built as well. There's plenty of sulphur in the deposits here, so if it all goes well, I suppose it's possible to dig a hot spring nearby.

But still, M-08 sure has quite the strange knowledge. Certainly, it's customary in this country to drink from hot springs, or rather, perhaps in this world, soaking in it like the Japanese do is something unusual?

"Well, I'll consider it. Once I know the location of the hot spring, I can have the golems dig it up. For now I'll include it in the future environmental improvement plan."

""Our utmost gratitude.""

I gave the bowing maids a sidelong glance as I turn around. I've grasped the progress here in general. Shall I head to the other research departments soon?

"I'm leaving now, but what do you plan to do now, Due? You still find it hard to meet the others?"

“It’s, not that, though.”

Due scratches his head with a troubled look. Probably, he’s concerned that things have been rather awkward with Drei. In spite of his frame, he’s quite the indecisive one. I’m fine with him being irresolute in regards to the experiments, but being indecisive here isn’t good. So as I leave the test site, I thought... when the hot spring’s found, let’s have them soak there first.

Apparently, Due will be staying there for a little while longer.

# Chapter 19

## Five Obstinate People Under the Earth

“...Hrmm.”

In a private study – also commonly known as an atelier – set up within the lab, I, who have just finished touring around most parts of the facility, am indulging myself in my thoughts. Save for the lacking manpower and a lot of points that need improvement in terms of sanitation, this new laboratory has been running in an extremely smooth manner. Mining, smelting and refining activities; weapon development; pharmacology research; magic experiments. They’re all going well, but...

“It seems like that there’s a bit of an excess in resources...”

That’s right. Originally, the deposits lie far in the remote recesses of the mountains, and it would be difficult to develop them using ordinary means. In exchange, however, the reserves of ores they held were vast. To the point that Laubert wasn’t at all talking big when he said about it being comparable to the average annual revenue of the country. Though, that means, dig too much of it and the resources will pile up too much too, which will then result in a capacity shortage in the storage facilities.

Anyhow, the material known as ‘gold’ is a heavy one. Like, seriously heavy. Gold is about two to up to five times the weight of iron at the same volume. Though I read it from some sort of a book in the previous life, there seems to be a case of a whole floor giving in, damaging the building in the process, due to an excessive storage of gold. I’m not so sure if that kind of thing won’t happen in this underground facility, even when this place has been reinforce through alchemy here and there.

I have to figure out some sort of ways to make use of them. In the first place, I made this large vein into a lab because I had wanted to make use of the various materials excavated from the place. Experiments and productions that are currently being carried out are an extension of the research that I’ve done up to the present. I’d like to make use of the special quality of this facility and commence some extravagant research using this abundant gold and silver any time now. There’s not one single

alchemist who can conduct their research under these favourable conditions, even in the research history that I read back in the academy. Isn't it such a waste to leave these resources to rot?

Well then, how should I put these gold and silver into practical use?

How about arms and armour for Uni and the Opus Series? There's a lot of things I want to do in this regard, but in truth, Victor and the officials stopped me from doing so. I understand that even their present equipment rivals, or even exceeds, the equipment of the strongest knights' order in the kingdom. As it is, it'd be inevitable that the higher-ups will carp at me if things turned out badly and they were to discover these items, and with my current political circumstances it would be dangerous for me to be having any more of these problems. So to say, if I were to reason that the expansion of these armaments were for the sake of national defence, I'll draw the enmity of other countries instead. If I were to do this, I'll just bring ruin to myself.

Then, why don't I use them as materials to be used for the lab's environment improvement plan? No no no, that won't do, that won't do. The place would be all glittery and it would be hard to settle in. A lab coated with gold and silver would drive me crazy, I would die. It won't be a suitable place to live for humans with properly working nervous systems. And besides, processing stones is much more economical than using gold. It's not a problem of money, it's just the problem of labour when producing these building materials with alchemy.

I had thought of making a large magic tool like the portal gate or the cooling device in the mansion, but it would be a waste of time to make these large things without a purpose in hand. The resources dedicated for my main research to probe into the concept of immortality is not to be sneezed at as well. Well, it doesn't take that much, but I don't feel like devoting the labour needed for the invention I'd fancy about.

Almost there, is there really nothing I can do with them? A practical and meaningful way to use these silver and gold—

“— That's it. Why don't I make a golem?”

Inspiration suddenly came up to me. That's right, golem sounds good. There are, more or less, various ways to utilise them, and above all, I don't have that much experience when it comes to making golems out of those materials. During my time in the academy, I've tried making golems out of diverse materials, but the Alchemy

Department there was a destitute one. And as one might expect, I don't have any experience of making golems using those precious materials. I might as well make the golem so elaborate to the point that it's ridiculous just for the kick of it.

Hm? Now that I think about it, simply making them out of gold and silver would be boring. Rather, why don't I make a gold-silver based magic alloy instead? Right, that sounds good. Let's go with that.

When I decided so, for some reason there's this indescribable feeling that I used to feel back in my childhood days.

Like I said, I'm an advocate of efficiency. But I'm a romanticist at the same time. If I don't have a fragment of that romance in me, then I'll end up just spending my time in vain when I reach immortality. If it's indeed possible for me to reach immortality, then I'd like to keep this pure feeling at that time, and also all the way up until that point.

"Right, somehow I can feel motivation and creative urge rising and stirring inside of me!"

So this is the so-called 'inspiration'? Ideal materials and swell ideas, and the explosive desire for action born when both of these factors combined. In my life, this feeling has often yields me great results. It's a feeling like what I felt back when I performed my marvels on Uni. The ingenious idea of having the potential-laden Uni and utilising alchemy to polish that very aspect has given me my crowning work of all.

Surely, this time, I can make something magnificent. Shivering with the premonition of that masterpiece-to-come, I merrily work on the raw materials that will be the masterpiece's basis first.



"Master...? Th, this is..."

Perhaps out of her concern to the fact that I've shut myself in the atelier for quite a while, Uni sticks out her face from the entrance door.

Eh... that's strange? From what I know, unless I call for her directly, it isn't often for Uni to enter without knocking.



“..... Ah, eh? Uni? Just now, did you knock?”

The voice that came out from my throat was hoarse, almost like it was ridden with rust. Hmmm? Did I catch a cold or something?

Upon hearing that voice, Uni’s face quickly loses its colour.

“...Master. My apologies for replying your question with my own question, but when did you last go to sleep?”

And then she curiously stared my way.

“Aaah. Could it be that I’ve been shutting myself here for days?”

“Yes, today would be the fifth day.”

He, hum, is that so...

What, five days!? Did she say it has been five days!?

I’m astounded in spite of myself. Now that she said that, I remember that I told Uni to make me whatever meals just for me to preserve myself and stay away from this place for awhile. I’ve been in such a rush in this creation of my personal pastime, that the reality that I’ve been here for five days slipped through me.

“...You should’ve called when I was midway of it...”

I know I’m in the wrong here, but for some reason the words of complaint were rushing through my mouth.

“My apologies. But..... I did call several times, but, errrr, every time I did so, Master replied, ‘I, I’m busy’”

Wow, now the fault’s completely mine.

And now that she said that, I kind of remember that there were several exchanges with someone from the other side of the door. But, as I thought, I couldn’t remember what I said then... Eh? Back then, when Uni was recalling my replies, didn’t she hesitate, like there was something she couldn’t say? Could it be that I said something in a terribly harsh way that I can’t seem to recall now? Something like, ‘Keep your trap shut! My

hands are bloody tied right now!'"?"

Just imagining it depresses me. What am I, like some kind of a shut-in useless son shouting angrily at his mother for worrying about him? Oh wait, that's exactly the case now is it.

"I'm sorry."

"Master?"

I spontaneously go down on my hands and knees and lower my head. Just what is this remorseful feeling... my head's all spinning and my mood is crashing down. It feels like I want to plant my head on this very spot of the floor right now.

"I'm sorry for being born. I'm really sorry for being alive..."

"...Ma, master? Are you going mad? Did Opus-04 bit you? Get a hold of yourself!"

As she said so, she grabbed me by the nape of my neck and dragged me outside the room. She dragged me as it is through the teleport gate bound for the residence. As I take that feeling in, my consciousness grows hazier——



——— And so, here we are.

"Are you a moron? No, Your Excellency, perchance, might you actually be intellectually challenged?"

"Give it a rest, Victor. The lord has already said that he's reflecting, and the fact that he's indeed sorry has already made clear, so let's stop rebuking him over and over again now."

And so on, the two among the top brass of my ranks of vassals has been persistently lecturing and continuously rebuking me. These two sure have some fine personalities. Especially Laubert, who smoothly delivered the killing blow while laughing.

“I already said sorry, alright? I’m reflecting. I won’t do it again.”

“Please say ‘I absolutely won’t ever do it again’ instead.....”

At my words, Victor makes the gesture of placing his hand on his forehead as if he’s enduring a headache.

If your head hurts that much I can fix it with lobotomy, though.

To that he said,

“Rather than a symptomatic therapy; I’d say I need a radical treatment more.”

And so I was cut off.

After that incident, I understand that Uni dragged me out, brought me back to the residence, washed me like how she’d wash the dishes, and left me to sleep for an entire two days. On paper it seems to be quite terrible, but the fact that I got away with just that is all I could’ve asked for. At worst, it’s not impossible for me to drop dead due to overwork after working for five days straight without rest. If I were to die because I got too absorbed in my hobby before I reached immortality, then why bother in the first place?

As I thought so, Victor shifted his gaze from me – who didn’t even grumble – to Uni, who’s refraining by my side.

“Madam Chief Maid, please do not spoil His Excellency too much. Surely there’s at least some will left in you to say something at times like these?”

“...I am terribly sorry.”

Uni obediently lowers her head. Seeing my number one Opus being talked down like this makes me a bit irritated.

“Hold on there. In this matter, Uni isn’t that much at a fault—”

“Yes, the primary offender here is His Excellency.”

And at that very moment Laubert pursued me. What a shrewd man. Although I’m glad he didn’t turn into an enemy, even as my ally he still gives me the tingles and I can’t

help it.

“No, Master isn’t at fault here. The fault lies in me, who couldn’t fulfil the role of remonstrating my lord———”

“Yes, ah, right... That’s right. Please take care of His Excellency properly from this point onwards, Madam Chief Maid.”

As Uni stands up to protect me, Laubert’s face twitches.

Just what’s with this atmosphere... It’s not Uni’s words, but, did being around Charl really infect me with some sort of a strange disease?

“Well, putting that aside...”

“Please don’t try to end the topic, Your Excellency. But, well, certainly, this has been quite the fruitless discussion...”

Victor agrees, while his face seems wants to say: ‘it can’t be helped’. Then let’s advance the topic right away.

“As I thought, it’s important to avoid losing the sense of time when shutting myself inside a large room where the sun doesn’t shine. No, it’s not only me, how was it for you when you were there, Laubert?”

“Let’s see. It feels like it’s always night-time down there, it does make me forget even things like ‘what day is today again?’. Though for a vampire like that man, it seems that he’s always healthy in a place like that

Certainly, Charl would be stronger in a place in a dark and sealed environment where the sunlight would be nothing but harmful to the inhabitants like that. But vampires are fundamentally like that no matter where.

“That said, I’d like to propose to adopt the sunlight to the environmental improvement plan, how does that sound?”

“Sunlight, in the undergrounds?”

“Yes, among the byproducts of our gold-mining, we also have quartz too, yes? If we use that and make them into glass tubes and stretch them, it’s possible to transmit the

sunlight from the ground up to the deep undergrounds through the tube.”

It’s also commonly called as ‘optical fiber’. If this method succeeds, it’ll be possible to cultivate greens which require sunlight as a necessity in the undergrounds as well. It’ll also be possible to secure the necessary amount of sunshine for human body to work properly, and will also contribute to normalise the residents’ biological clock. Apparently, those advantages clicked with the clear-headed home affairs expert pair too.

“So even that is possible... But if the sunlight reaches the undergrounds, then it’ll be hard on the vampires.”

“Of course, I’ll restrict the light to reach select sections only. Direct sunlight will damage some of the materials, and its effect on paper is not good either. Well, the current, rather humid and dusty, environment is also as bad in these regards, though.”

A little amount of sunlight won’t put Charl in pain, but he still won’t feel good about it. At the end of the day, this lighting plan is merely to refresh humans, and also, agriculture. Since the plan takes time and labour, as expected I have no intention to completely illuminate the undergrounds.

“Hmm, it’s indeed an interesting plan. If this can be realised, it won’t be impossible for that underground space to attain complete self-sufficiency. By any chance, Your Excellency, have you planned this out for quite some time now?”

“I just feel that I have to tackle things starting from this matter as early as I can. In truth, I had wanted to start by expanding the underground space first.”

“Then why don’t we start from there? If we want the environment to be more comfortable, then shouldn’t we by all means do that? Besides, I think that it’s easier to plan early where there’s plenty of room for expansion, rather than later.”

Laubert said. Since he knows the pain of going way under, his remarks was valid.

“There’s just a bit of a problem there... See, we’re going to bring light from the outside, yes? Which means, the facility to let the sunlight in must be built on top of the lab.”

“Aah, I see...”

Imagine. In the depths of a remote mountain, there lies a mysterious facility of glass

tubes, piercing the earth towards the undergrounds. Due to geographical factor, people won't run into them that quickly, but when people do run into them, that sight will stand out. I mean, *really* stand out. Then rumours like 'there must be some sort of a secret hideout below' will spread like wildfire. In the unlikely event when people actually approach them, we're out.

*TL Note: "out" in the sense of baseball "out".*

And it just so happens that the development of the new mines for business in Marlin has just been tendered out. Depending on how much revenue they make, some prospector will want to look for a new vein throughout the region and they will come one after another. If someone among them made the wrong turn and broke into the mountain where the lab is located, it's a given that the lab will be discovered too. And then the information will find its way to the capital, where my brother and Victor's father remains.

"But that'll only be a matter of time, right? And so, there's this considerably large vein in Laubert's report. This vein can also be pinpointed by the gold dust in the river bed. Let's defiantly expand the facility as much as we wish here. It lies literally in the middle of nowhere, far in the depths of the mountains, it'll take days for a small band of prospectors to discover it."

"But since Your Excellency took the trouble to say all these things, I suppose there's some kind of a good-for-nothing countermeasure in place there too, yes?"

As expected from one of the pair of famous young official who's running these frontiers. What fine decisiveness and foresight.

"Yeah. There's still time until the results of the mine revenue are out and prospectors begin to move, add to that the interval between them moving and them discovering the facility. With that, there's enough cards to play in our hands. Though, as Laubert said, the plan is a good-for-nothing one."

"Ah, figured so."

One of the pair shifts his gaze toward heaven, and the other shifts his gaze the other way. As to who did what, well, it doesn't matter.

As both of them seems to have lost their will to ask further at the same time, Uni came to ask.

“Then, Master, what is your plan?”

“Yes. Needless to say, Marlin is a hinterland in the frontiers. And for that, we do have an abundance of nature and plenty of pristine lands where humans’ hands don’t reach. Our lab is among those lands.

And that’s why I could do something like digging and drilling during the wintertime. I could do something like moving huge golems to excavate the grounds, since the land is so secluded to the point it was impossible to be found out by any single soul.

“However... In a pristine secluded land like this, you’d think there should be at least one or two undiscovered dungeons, yes?”

Victor stood up, not realising he was making clatters and loud noises as he rose. His face turns so pale it’s almost worrying.

Not minding Victor, Uni nods.

“I see, so on top of the lab that’s substantially similar to a dungeon, Master is planning to make another new dungeon.”

“Another dungeon? I won’t do something so stingy like that. Two. I did say ‘one or two’ back then, didn’t I?”

“...So the lighting facility will be placed on a dungeon, and the surrounding mountains will also help to achieve the purpose of camouflaging the facility.”

“Madam Chief Maid, why are you being so calm here?! We’re talking about dungeons here! Setting aside the covert place where the underground space where the lab lies, to think the very mountain will be turned into a dungeon itself! If those people in the capital were to catch a whiff of this, it’d be good if it could end with just a summons from the high court! At worst, a whole army of the strongest knights’ order and adventurers could come knocking, you know!?”

Still pale, Victor keeps rattling on about his objections. Well, of course he would. What I’m proposing here is basically picking a fight with the kingdom just so the underground lab’s environment can be improved.

However,

“No, I think it’s quite the good idea, though?”

“Laubert!? Have you gone mad? Did he perform another readjustment on you when you were down under?!”

Well, what he said was a bit rude. However, it seems that Laubert has noticed the merits of the plan.

“I’m in my right mind. Well, I wonder if a someone whose head has been tampered with can be right in their mind, though. Victor, you were saying about if those in the capital were to catch a whiff of this, but... like His Excellency said, Marlin is one of the most remote regions, even in the southern parts of the kingdom. If someone were to learn that there’s a dungeon here, as long as they don’t know that His Excellency made it himself, it won’t lead to his impeachment.”

“What did you say?”

Indeed, Marlin is a frontier, and the location of my lab is among its most secluded place unprecedented by any human intelligence. If there were to be an undiscovered dungeon in such a place, it wouldn’t explicitly lead people to question my management responsibility as its lord. ‘As more people enter into mine development than ever before, they happen to stumble upon an undiscovered dungeon as well’. I can do with this answer.

“Well..... that’s certainly... no... but, there’s still a problem there, Your Excellency. Even if you manage to tell people that the dungeon you constructed yourself is an unprecedented discovery, what about the materials used to construct the dungeon itself? If you want to fortify the mountain, then it’ll be fine if you deploy tree-type monster there, but the lighting facility will be placed there as well and it’ll be a considerably large artifact. If people were to use ‘Detect’ spell on it and figure out when it was built, then doesn’t that mean that we risk losing everything here?”

“As expected from Victor, you certainly make a good point. However, you do know that alchemists do have an alias, yes?”

“‘Swindler’, isn’t it? No, it’s not like I’m doubting Your Excellency’s skills though...”

“No, I’m not talking about that. It’s just that it’s the prevailing view... Here, look.”

All of a sudden, a bundle of parchments were thrown at him. From the look of it, they



look considerably aged.

“Oh. What is this...? Hmm, these seems to be two hundred years old, I see. It’s curious that nothing is written here, though.”

And, he skillfully appraised the parchments’ age. Actually, Victor has some magic potential with him. If it’s only basic spells, even him can use it. A spell like “Detect” would have great use in assessing fine arts that is indispensable for those of the nobility, so of course he’d know the spell.

For this time only though, his answer was way off.

“Those are parchments for official document use that I bought a while ago.”

“Ah, I see... So, you’re not trying to pull one on me, yes? I know that Your Excellency is an eccentric person, but just who would buy a useless parchment like this?”

“You still don’t get it?”

“Don’t get what?”

I was just about to tell perplexed Victor the answer when someone interjected.

“No way... did you disguise a brand new parchment as a two-hundred years old by using alchemy?”

It was Laubert. What he said was correct, but I wish he had read a bit more into it. Even though I had wanted to make a joke about it with a posed look...

“He got it. So, your appraisal spell has just given you the wrong answer, how do you feel about it?”

“How!?!..... The washed-up colour can indeed be forged, but, there’s no way it could fool an appraisal spell...!”

Somehow Victor’s role is to be the surprised one here. Perhaps it’s because he’s just serious by nature.

“Well, I vamped up the parchment so it gave an impression that it is two hundred years old when it’s appraised by a spell. It’s possible that the alchemists of old used to profit

by forging fine arts. If they did that, it's possible for them to get filthy rich even if they couldn't turn lead into gold. Hence the 'swindler' alias."

I haven't heard anything that could substantiate that account though. Well, alchemy is a minor field in this world. Just how many barristers at that time were wise enough to expertly prove that a fraud was taking place? In the first place, how many victims realised that they were scammed in the first place?

Uni gives an additional explanation to the shaking Victor,

"As there are many things that are irreversibly impaired over time, renewing old things prove to be a difficult task, it is however surprisingly easy to make new things seem old. It's possible for another alchemist as skilled as Master to see through the ruse, but..."

"At the very least, you won't find anyone like that in this kingdom. And I have the confidence to insist on that. So far, the only alchemist comparable to me that I'm aware of is the professor who used to be my mentor."

And there's no people with spare time who'd bother bringing an alchemist to appraise a dungeon's building material, nor there's people who'd put their trust in this field in the first place. Besides, Professor Graumann is a foreigner. Even if someone from this country were to request him to do so, he's not obliged to comply. He's also currently busy researching immortality as well, just like me.

"What a staggering amount of preparation... For someone who has yet to reach twenty, it's impressive that you've come so far on this path. Is there some sort of a secret behind it?"

Victor's words were more of an expression of astonishment rather than a praise. Perhaps he never thought that alchemy— a field that is, albeit a discipline in the arcane, minor— would have so much impact in this world, starting from the fact that he was brainwashed using knowledge from that field. And come to think of it, the fact that someone who's not even in their twenties could master that field to this extent might've been a menacing one.

"From my point of view, it's just that, it seems that the other alchemists are doing their research in a terribly roundabout way."

There's a lot of unseparated portions between "alchemy" and "natural sciences". For

some reason, the knowledge of medicine-making and chemical composition is included in the field of alchemy. In my previous world, it seems that before the age of Newton, alchemists were once viewed as scientists, it seems that this world has the same confusion as well.

So, as a person who have received a basic education in a world where science has made progress, I could tell the noise in the field and concentrate only on the “alchemy” portion. That is why my rate of progress was different than my fellow student.

If there’s another factor to it, then,

“Also, he performs more human experimentations than any other people, that counts too, I suppose?”

“I see.”

Victor nods at Laubert’s words. Seems like another rude remark was thrown in there, but well, Laubert was correct. The data obtained from human experimentation has been most useful. For you see, as the outcome of the research is aimed for humans, the research should also be actually experimented on human bodies. Once, there was a certain country that turned out victorious in a war, and they took the research data obtained from human experimentation from the defeated country. They didn’t take it to turn it into evidence in the court, they took it so they could make use of it and advance their own country’s medicine and weapon development. That harvested data was just *that* valuable and helpful. Well, it’s something that happened in my previous world, so my memory about it is all fuzzy.

As I think about those miscellaneous things,

“Master, you should return to the original topic.”

“Whoops, right, there’s still that. So, the point is, even if we were to make a dungeon in the depths of the mountains, the possibility of connecting that to me is minimal. It can instead obstruct people from discovering the lab, and that there is a plus.”

“I see, I understand that it may be good for Your Excellency as an alchemist. However, as the lord who governs this land, just what kind of dungeon – which is technically a monster’s den – will you personally make? If the monsters were to overflow from there, for a territory with inadequate armaments like Marlin, things will be rough.”

As a home affairs official, that opinion was becoming of him. However, I'm not negligent enough to forget about those parts.

"Since it'll be built in a remote place, I feel that the impact on the people will be minimal, though? We'll regularly thin them out so they don't increase too much. Materials that can be harvested from them are valuable, you see. It's convenient to have a 'ranch' nearby for research purposes as well, and it'll also be a training field for the Opus series. We'll be hitting two birds with one stone."

"Then what will you do when the dungeon is finally discovered? Adventurers in search of new hunting grounds will rush in there. When that happens, I think that the risk of the lab being discovered will rise."

"Victor."

"Yes."

"Have you been listening to me?"

He's not an incompetent person who is just going to act all surprised at my proposal. I've consulted my policies and strategies with him many times. He's a victim of what I'm doing here as well. Surely, when I say this, there's no reason for him to still not understand this and ask me something like "then what are you going to do with the people who's coming to investigate you?" or "how are you going to use these people?".

Sure enough, he sighs as he answers.

"...The dead don't talk. And the "material" you were talking about is not limited to the corpse of the monsters. Am I correct?"

"Well put. If I had to add anything to that, catching them alive would've been more preferable, right?"

Indeed. If people were to go missing in some kind of remote mountain while there's nothing there, others may come to suspect the incidents. But, what if people were to go missing in a dungeon, or better yet, the near-deepest parts of a it? 'Well, maybe the monsters offed them'. I can do whatever I please to those who can't talk. And strong experiment materials will absolutely come, so I'd say this makes me want to shout screams of joy. Even if they end up dead, I can make them into a fresh golem, or maybe do something on a grander scale with Charl's help.

“What do you think, Laubert?”

“Yes, I think it’s a good plan. Adventurers will come to the dungeon, so that’ll be a positive impact economics-wise. It’s also a good opportunity to establish new industries. Facilities they will patronise, like lodgings, smitheries, supply shops, entertainment...”

That idea didn’t cross my mind.

Ah, right, the dungeon itself is an industry. Now that I think about it, a dungeon is like a workplace for adventurers. If I make a place where they can work, then of course those seeking for work will come. This’ll be the birth of a new economy.

“And there’s also Marlin’s primary trade product, potions. If the adventurers were to buy and consume them locally, it’ll be considerably more profitable for us, see? There’s no intermediary margins for the wholesale merchants, and there’s no freight cost too. If we can get new customers ourselves, the merchants will be pressured to revise the transaction value of the potions. Ah, that’s right, in addition, how does mobilising the mass-produced slaves to manufacture equipments to be sold for the adventurers sound?”

With flowing eloquence, he keeps on proposing new policies. Perhaps since this man had been unemployed for so long, he becomes energetic as soon as he finds a place where he can make use of his talent. Well, if it’s useful for me, I don’t mind the way he is.

“Laubert, I see that His Excellency have mostly tainted you as well...”

Quietly remarked Victor.

At his colleague’s remark, Laubert leaked out a dry laugh.

“Well, we won’t be able to get away from the lord so long as we live, Victor. Might as well let yourself be tainted quickly.”

“A sensible judgement.”

“Thank you, Chief Maid.”

Indeed, indeed, familiarising yourself with your workplace is a good thing. You can

work without being stressed that way. Victor, if you do a bit more of that, that headache of yours will considerably occur less often too.

“And so, in addition with the plan of the lab’s environment improvements, I think that we should also press forward with the plan to develop the dungeons in the outskirts. At the same time, there’s a lot of manpower required here. Pick up some people with magic potential among the new slaves bought for the copper mine development and send them my way. I will handle the construction and the structural alteration of the lab and mobilise the Opus series to collect monsters to be released in the dungeon.”

“Who will be the person in charge? If you’re sending out someone conspicuous, your brother and my father – the centralists’ information network will be involved.”

“It’ll be someone conspicuous though, I’ll be sending Drei out. With her evil eye, it’ll be easy for her to capture her prey, and she can quickly travel long distances by using teleportation magic. Besides, I don’t send her to the front stage, so even if she’s spotted, there’ll be nothing to tie her with me.”

“Right. If it’s a collared dark elf, then those who witness her, they’d think her to be nothing more but an outcast adventurer. Besides, people are starting to know about Madam Chief Maid and Sir Due being Your Excellency’s subordinate, and Sir Vampire is, well, how should I put this...”

“Well Sir Vampire is a Lord class. If people were to witness him, a band of A-ranked adventurers will be sent to suppress him. Even if he wouldn’t be discovered, his character makes sending him out impossible.”

Really, how did his personality become like that? Even I, who readjusted him, am the one most baffled here.

“I don’t have a problem if it’s Drei. She looks young, but she’s among the long-living species. She’s at least one or two hundred years old, and she must’ve already get used to acting alone in secluded lands.”

“I strongly recommend her myself too... I was just thinking of what to do if it was zero-four instead.”

Uni is unexpectedly being harsh. I get where she’s coming from though.

“Well then, this matter is concluded. Let us figure out the details for these plans at a

later time.”

“Right. Well then, let’s move along to the original important topic that Your Excellency pushed aside. First, about the progress of the copper mine development——”



So, after I finished my job above, I came back to the lab.

“Well that idea is just out there now, isn’t it? ‘Making an underground dungeon isn’t gonna cut it, so let’s make another aboveground’, just what to say about this...”

“Still, quite an interesting job you have there, Master. I myself have been recently bored, for there’s no opponent to show my strength to.”

“Tsk, how enviable, Drei-senpai. I wanna go to the outside once in a while too...”

Those were the Opus series’ reaction to the new plan. Due doesn’t seem to be very enthusiastic about it, Drei seems to be brimming with motivation, and Charl is just out of the question. Uni is in favour, so if I’m going with the majority vote, that’ll be two ayes, one nay, and one invalid vote – the motion is adopted. Not that it matters though, since my order takes precedence.

By the way, shouldn’t Charl at least mind the fact that we’re going to bring sunlight into this place a bit more?

“But, Oubeniel-kun? I wonder if you’re biting too much than you can chew here. Just as it is, you’re wearing another hat as the feudal lord here, adding to that, you’re going to expand the lab and create dungeons. You also shut yourself in the atelier sometimes for some reason... At this rate, our research will be put into a halt yet again.”

“How unusual. For this man to make a reasonable comment...”

“Wa, that’s cruel! Just what do you think I aaam!?”

Charl’s opinion certainly hits the mark.

However, there’s the matter of necessity.

“I get it, however, this is a necessary investment. It’ll be even more dangerous than

ever if people were to discover this lab at this time. Also, as the environment of the lab interior is a rough one, wouldn't it be better for us to improve things now, instead of postponing it for later? And besides, like I've explained before, the research profits from this too."

"A 'ranch' for experiment materials, huh... well at least there'll be a plenty of people to spar against my sword, so I guess I can be happy about it."

The one who said that was Due, whose resentment has been building up for having to stay in this place. I suppose he'll be a bit sunnier if he can let off some steam. It is also my wish to be able to satisfy his peculiar preference of living on the edge as he duels people to death. I will surely get myself a lot of fine experiment materials.

"In addition, I'll be expanding the number of the mass-produced slaves. In the first place, compared to the originally planned number, we're pretty much really short of them right now. If possible, I'd like to at least increase them threefold."

It's mainly because Due's purchase of Drei. But since I got myself an excellent piece thanks to that, it's fine.

Then, at my remarks, Charl's eyes shines

"So, you're going to get me slaves too, yes? Virgins. Virgins!"

"Ah, yes. That..."

Of course my mood would be spoiled by that. He'd say something troublesome in an inappropriate time like this, even if he gets beaten up by Uni and the other Opus as a result. Does he want a virgin's blood that much? Well he probably does. He's a vampire after all.

"Just leave that perv of a vampire alone... by the way, Master. Hearing the new plan almost made me forget to ask this, just what exactly did you do in the atelier the other day? You seemed to be so immersed in your work, to the point you didn't reply when Uni tried to call you."

And so Drei asked me about the matter that had started all this. Well, of course she'd be wondering about it. Her lord had basically changed class and messed about for five consecutive days.



“Nah, well, about that... It’s just that I was pondering about a way to use the excess material from the mineral section, and when I began the research that actually was my pastime, I unexpectedly got too immersed in it. Before I knew it, I got recklessly absorbed into it. I’m still reflecting now.”

“...Then, Master, just what exactly did you try to make back then?”

Attentively, Uni smoothly advances the topic. Even though she was the one who was bothered with the most trouble in this matter, what a do-well slave. Perhaps I can understand why Victor said that she has been spoiling me too much.

I’m grateful for what she has done, therefore shy as I am, let me answer her here.

“It’s new kind of golem. Something different than those disposable golems used for civil engineering and mining works. Plenty of high-grade materials are used, and its design was made from scratch, for it was intended to be deployed permanently... Upon its completion, this golem will be Opus-05.”

“Oh...”

“The opus won’t be something based on a high-grade experimental material like us, it’ll be literally born from nothing...”

There’s flickering heat in Uni’s eyes. The aura of “how wonderful Master is!” that she emits is, how to say this, making me bashful.

As a fellow mage, Drei seems to be immensely curious about the creation of this golem as well.

As for the men...

“Golems huh... So blood won’t be flowing in its veins... I know that I’m forbidden from tasting the blood of my companions, but this is..... hah...”

Oi, Charl. Just why are you assuming that I’ll be making a female-type?

“This bat man is seriously without manners... Well anyway, quite the hearty story you’ve got the, Milord. Making a golem out of gold and silver...”

“Ha? Who said that I was going to make it from silver and gold?”

I tilt my head at Due’s remarks.

He gave me a blank look in reply.

“Hah? No, didn’t you say it yourself? You said you were trying to figure out a way to make use of the materials mined here.”

“Ah, so that’s it... Well I don’t plan to use the silver and gold to construct the golem’s body. It’s a new high-tech material that will serve as the basis for the golem. I made an alloy from those materials with alchemy and am planning to use that alloy...”

“In any case, it’s still quite the extravagant talk... so, what kind of alloy did you make from melting those gold and silver?”

“I’m interested as well. At that time, among the specimens in the atelier, there was a metal I’m not familiar of...”

Uni said. Well, she’s been my assistant for many years now. She’s sharp-sighted, not only for the matter of the run in the mill magic, but in alchemy-related matters as well.

“Oh, that? I think you’ve seen them before, though.”

“Have I?”

“Yes, when I was studying abroad at St. Gallen, We should have seen an ingot like that at the Academy’s museum.”

I pointed that out to her. Even for me, it wasn’t something that’s so easy to make. I’ve only seen its successful synthesis once. Well, actually, I asked Uni to sneak in with me to touch the alloy thoroughly and take a tiny sample of it.

“...What is he talking about? Do you know anything about it, vampire?”

“Weeell, I was at the academy at that time, but... a rare ingot that adorned the academy’s museum, you say? If it’s something that can be made from existing material

from this place, I guess he made mythril from silver or something?”

“Don’t ask me, it’s something entirely out of my expertise...”

While the other Opus couldn’t reach the correct answer, as expected, Uni, who could get near to the answer in the first place, quickly noticed.

“.....Master.”

“What is it?”

“That vermillion-coloured metal with that rainbow-coloured luster about it... that sample, could it be... an ‘orichalcon’?”

Her remarks made the air froze.

Next thing I know, with a noise that almost seem like a creak, Drei constrainedly faces my way.

“Ori, chal... con? Could it really be *that* orichalcon?”

“A, AHAHAHAHA! M, Maid, you’re unexpectedly good with jokes! As if something like that could exist!”

“It’s annoying, but I’ll have to agree. By orichalcon you mean that famous legendary metal, yes? Even someone who’s not an expert knows about that. And then, you’re saying that you made that so you can use it for your golem? A fine jest, I’d say.”

And then these simultaneous attacks. Ah, as I thought, this kind of reaction hurts me.

Well, if it can’t be helped, I’d say it’s indeed can’t be helped. Orichalcon is that kind of metal. Its luster outperforms even gold, its elasticity is superior to silver, and it’s easier to process than copper. It is a legendary material, considered stronger than anything in this world. It’s an ultra-rare legacy material that can only be found in an archaeological excavation of a slightly prehistoric ruins of a civilisation as weapons or small ingots, which can’t be found in this era at all. That is what Orichalcon is.

If I were to hear that a certain alchemist somewhere managed to successfully synthesise it, I’d also not only doubt the information itself, I’d also doubt the sanity of the person who told me the information itself.

“Well you might say that, but it can’t be helped that I successfully synthesised it.”

As I said so sulkily, the other three stopped dead in their tracks yet another time. The only calm one is Uni, who understand my skills more than anyone else.

“.....Did you really synthesise it?”

“Didn’t I just say so?”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“That’s impossible... I can’t believe it... Huh!? Did you perhaps send the maid to steal it from the academy or rob it from the treasure chest of the royal family?!”

“You want me to mess with your brain, Charl?”

Everyone’s still half-convinced even now that I’ve asserted it again. And in the chaos a certain someone would blurt out something that’s pretty much improper..... Wait, isn’t this just the usual?

I’ve grown tired of this skit, so I’ll continue talking.

“I understand what you feel, but calm down and listen to me. ‘Orichalcon’... do you understand the meaning of the word in the first place?”

“If I were to remember correctly, it’s ‘mountain copper’ in ancient language..... Eh? Could it be—-”

Drei’s main job is related to magic, so of course she’d know. Because she’s already familiar with these things, she caught on quickly.

“Yes, that’s it. I had a sample of copper drilled for the pilot project, I did several trials and errors. And I finally got to synthesise it.”

“So... does it mean, you can make orichalcon by mixing copper with gold?”

“If it were that simple, people would’ve been able to make it ages ago. Generally, you can only make a gold-copper alloy out of that. Its appearance and characteristic is

different, and there's only five percent of gold mixed in it."

Gold is one of the most important substances in alchemy. Of course it's also used to make the finest alloy that is Orichalcon in large quantity. There's no way you can make that alloy with less than ten percent gold in it.

"However, the concept is close. Using alkahest, I was able to draw out the characteristics of copper and mixed it together with gold. By doing that, I was able to figure out that the properties similar to copper can be applied to gold. When I combined it further with silver, the silver's properties were also added to the alloy. Hence the magically melded substance from the three metals. When I examined that material, I see that it was almost identical to the orichalcon I saw in the academy once."

"Wait a minute, alkahest? Did you just say alkahest like it was nothing?"

"Yes I did. It's a miraculous solvent to draw out the characteristics of gold... well, it's still not the finished product yet, so it's not yet able to do that with gold."

By the way, it's staggeringly corrosive. Its reputation as a universal solvent isn't just for show, it literally can melt just about anything. When using it, you will have to apply the correct amount on top of the material you want to synthesise. Failure to do so will result on it ruining not only the material, but its container as well.

People sometimes confuse it for aqua regia, but of course they're two different things. In contrast to the imperfect alkahest I use, while it can melt gold, it can't melt silver. Alkahest does not corrode a material by oxidizing it, it instead literally just melts and dissolves the material, which itself is a mysterious phenomenon. It's a substance to draw out the spiritual essence of a material that dwells inside its physical elements. As it completely melts and dissolves anything to nothing provided that it has the same mass, rather than a chemical, alkahest is closer to antimatter. Well, if it were to follow the principle of annihilation between matter and antimatter, then from what I've done, the whole Ithuselah continent will be blown to bits without a trace, so of course it is not exactly antimatter.

Drei left her trembling mouth open.

"Doesn't that count as one of the secrets of alchemy?"

"I guess. So what?"

“No, what do you mean ‘so what’...”

“Drei-senpai, did you forget who this man is? He’s our master, Oubeniel, alright? He’s someone who could tamper with the head of a dark elf, or artificially make a Vampire Lord like me, alright? “

“It’s very convincing... But It’s frustrating that I have to hear it from you...!”

And suddenly Charl was on his knees. Was it that much of a shock?

“It’s not something to be surprised about, yes? Alkahest is used to make the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’, which is a necessary element to obtain immortality, but here we’re just using it to melt gold.”

“Philosopher’s Stone” is a tool that has been considered indispensable to attain the most arcane in alchemy since ancient times. I understand that it is used to create gold or the elixir of immortality. Of course, making it is also one of my goals.

However, I do not know how much effect it will exert as I never see the real thing. I would be stumped if I were to manage to make the real thing and it turned to be a fluke compared to its reputation. It is also a legendary existence that the famous alchemy pioneers could not reach. It’s also possible that I still won’t be able to make it when my lifespan runs out.

Therefore, it’s essential to learn about methods to extend my life using other aspects as well. A high-level experiment in regard of vampirisation, such as Charl’s augmentation, is among those efforts.

“Setting whether I can make alkahest that can melt gold aside, if the failure were on this side, I’d think that it’s weird even if I were to manage to successfully perfect it.”

“I don’t think that’s the problem, though... sigh, I got picked up by an utterly ridiculous lord...”

Due said as he scratches his head.

In the other hand, Charl appears to be spellbound.

“Still, Master sure is wonderful! Regardless of the alkahest improvement, you still managed to make orihalcon. *The* orihalcon! You managed to make something like that!

When the orihalcon golem finally can be mass produced, you can even conquer this continent! Hey, hey, Master! When you have finally conquered the continent, can I have at least one country? It's fine, right?

It seems that for some reason he has just conjured a preposterous diagram of future plans in his head. Though Due and the rest of the Opus series commented something like "again, this guy..." as they stared at him.

If I leave him as he is, his imagination is likely to go to a ridiculous direction, so first, I'll correct that mistake for now.

"Don't say something so ridiculous. Didn't I tell you? It's difficult to handle alkahest which is needed for a step in production of orihalcon. So I can't mass produce it."

"Eeeeh."

"Don't 'eeeeh' me. What's impossible is impossible. With the exception of the high-end model that is Opus-05, we'll be making the mass-produced version from silver-derived mythril."

"But what about conquering the continent?"

"...I've ran out of riposte already."

"Besides,"

I separated my words. The important thing is after this.

"First, what happened to that ancient civilisation that was able to utilise its orihalcon abundantly? It was completely destroyed and there's virtually no trace of it. Was it consumed by internal fighting while possessing technology that was too advanced in its age? Or perhaps it was destroyed by the demons in the crisis hundreds of years ago? Theories that explain the end of that civilisation varies, but whatever the true cause was, at the end of the day, the result remains unchanged. Save for some old ruins, they're all extinct. They all died out and disappeared..... it's not a joke."

Yes, it's really not a joke.

No matter how prosperous you get, it is all pointless if you're dead.

That literally empty state where you can't feel the heat nor the cold, where you't feel joy nor pain.

That kind of fate, I sincerely pass.

"That's why, it's not enough."

"..... HYIH!?"

"Orihalcon? If it's only that, then it's far from enough. Because this is the very proof that the ancients who lived thousands and ten thousands years ago failed to attain immortality. If they managed to attain it, then wouldn't their splendour remain until this day? So, it's too early to be festive just because of this. It's nothing but a single rare metal, we're still going to die that way..... What is it Char? You look pale."

I had make quite the unusual long speech, but when I realised it, Charl seems to be strange. His face, which is already pale in the first place, has become even paler now, his face is almost ashen in colour.

...Could it be that he doesn't have enough blood? The amount of cultured blood that I gave him should be sufficient... Maybe he really needs the blood of a living virgin that he requested over and over again?

"A, A, AHAHAHAHA! I was, being, ca, careless now, wasn't I? That's right. Master's purpose, is to attain immortality, yes?"

"That's correct. Don't forget that. What I'm doing here to the very end is to plan so I don't die... After that, well, I figure out a hobby so I can enjoy that life itself. I don't have the spare time for world conquest. Though whether that can be achieved or not is a different matter entirely."

I shifted my gaze after I said so. For some reason, Charl is currently stuttering, just like him before his operation. Apparently he's really in a bad condition. Somehow, I feel bad just by looking at him.

Hmm, have I been caring too much about the probability of him rebelling against me that it gave him excessive stress? Even though I'm troubled by his insubordination, I'm certain that he's a necessary human resource for my research. As I thought, he'll need some care.



Can't be helped. Maybe I'll splurge a bit and allot some slaves for him. Though if I were to say something here he's just going to be carried away again, so I'll be silent until I actually give him what he wants.

As I think about that matter, Uni abruptly gave me a bow.

"It's good that Master hasn't forgotten his original purpose."

"Just what are you saying so suddenly, Uni? Of course there's no way I'd forget now, is there?"

"Then, please keep good care of yourself so that you'll be able to avoid being too absorbed in your research, harming your own body in the process."

...It hurts if she puts it that way.

I already told Charl, but the reason why I kept going for nights until I collapsed was because I was too absorbed in my zeal when I was trying to make orichalcon.

Now that my do-well follower has said that, I'll make sure that I'll be careful next time.



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